



European  
University  
Institute

DEPARTMENT  
OF HISTORY  
AND  
CIVILIZATION

## The Revolution of a Little Hero:

The *Sanmao* Comic Strips and the Politics of  
Childhood in China, 1935-1962

Laura Pozzi

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization  
of the European University Institute

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**Department of History and Civilization**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the production, content and development of cartoonist Zhang Leping's *Sanmao* comic strips between 1935 and 1962 in the context of the growing political and cultural significance of childhood in twentieth century China. After years of wars and dramatic political changes, Sanmao is still a recognizable visual icon in China today, and his lasting popularity makes him an interesting case-study for understanding the development of cartoon art and the political deployment of the image of the 'child' in China over the twentieth century. This thesis investigates two main problems: firstly, it aims to analyze how through his strips Zhang Leping intervened in contemporary debates about the significance and role of children in the development of the Chinese nation; secondly, it follows the transformation of fictional child-hero Sanmao from a commentator on contemporary China in the early 1930s into a sustainer of the Chinese Communist Party after 1949. While Zhang Leping's comic strips have often been considered as a product of political graphic production or as reading material for children, this thesis analyzes the content of *Sanmao* strips employing childhood as an analytical category in order to understand the role of children in the political and social discourses which took place in China during war and revolution. By analyzing the production of *Sanmao* comic strips, their relevance in the political context in which they appeared, and the factors which propelled the popularity of the little hero before and after 1949, this thesis shows how the image of Sanmao has changed over time, and how it was ultimately appropriated and reshaped by the CCP in order to fit the party's official vision of history and educational aims.



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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents an historical analysis of the production, content and development of the *Sanmao* 三毛 comic strips of Zhang Leping 張樂平 (1910-1992) between 1935 and 1962, in the context of the growing political significance of childhood in twentieth century China. The thesis investigates two main problems: firstly, how through his strips Zhang Leping intervened in contemporary debates about the significance and role of children in the development of the Chinese nation; secondly, the transformation of fictional child-hero Sanmao from a commentator on contemporary China in the early 1930s into a supporter of the Chinese Communist Party after 1949.

Zhang Leping moved from Zhejiang Province to Shanghai at the age of fifteen in the late 1920s eager to start a career in the flourishing publishing industry of the Chinese metropolis. In the mid-1930s, he became well known among cartoonists and the public thanks to his comic strips based on the adventures of Sanmao, an engaging little boy whose name derived from the three locks of hair standing up in the middle of his oversized head. Although during his long career Zhang Leping produced numerous cartoons, posters and commercials, Sanmao remains the artist's most recognizable and celebrated creation. After his first appearance in Shanghai magazines in 1935, Sanmao became the main hero of an enduring comic serial, in which his social background and living environment changed according to the artist's aims and contemporary political conditions. When he first appeared, Sanmao was a middle-class city child, but he became a resister in the propaganda cartoons produced during the Second Sino-Japanese War, a soldier in 1945 comic serial *Sanmao Joins the Army* (*Sanmao congjun ji*, 三毛從軍記), an orphan lost in the streets of Shanghai during the civil conflict in the *Wandering Life of Sanmao* (*Sanmao liulang ji*, 三毛流浪記), and finally an icon of the Liberation in strips produced until 1962, the year of publication of the last comic serial of Sanmao before the beginning of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966. The transformations of *Sanmao* comic strips throughout the first thirty years of their publication reflected the central role of children in the political and social discourses which took place during war and revolution in China and over time reflected changes in Zhang Leping's political ideas.

After years of war and dramatic political change, Sanmao is still one of the most recognizable visual icons of twentieth century China, and his lasting popularity makes him a compelling case-study for the understanding of the development of cartoon art, children's literature and the political deployment of the image of the 'child' in China over the first half of the twentieth century. Although *The Wandering Life* is certainly one of Zhang Leping's most interesting works, in order to fully understand its content, the reasons underpinning of the artist's choice to portray Sanmao as an orphan and the success of his strips, it is necessary to analyze Zhang Leping's earlier works, the development of his political thought and the agencies which influenced his production and contributed to the popularization of the image of Sanmao.

This thesis aims to answer a number of distinct yet interconnected questions about the production of *Sanmao* comic strips, their relevance in the political context in which they appeared for the first time and the factors which propelled the popularity of the image of Sanmao: Why did Zhang Leping decide to make a child the main hero of his comic serials? What do his strips tell us about the political value of childhood in twentieth century China? What do *Sanmao* strips tell us about Zhang Leping's political thought and his contribution to graphic art in China? How did the image of Sanmao change over time and why? How did the CCP appropriate the image of Sanmao and with what effects? By answering these questions, I want to contribute to contemporary studies in the fields of the history of childhood and history of graphic arts in modern China.

There are three main reasons which make this thesis an original contribution to the historiography of modern China. First, while Zhang Leping's comic strips have often been considered either in the context of contemporary political graphic production or as reading material for children, one of the most outstanding characteristics of Zhang Leping's strips was their ability to merge the political nature of cartoon art into a story *about* children and also *for* children. Because of his young age, Sanmao certainly attracted the attention of children who Zhang Leping often cited as his main readers. However, to analyze *Sanmao* strips only as reading material for children is limiting, since the content of these strips is often rhetorically complex, highly metaphorical, deliberately controversial, and thus difficult to understand for young readers. Zhang Leping's comic strips can be analyzed from several perspectives. They were entertaining images; they contained political statements and they were also considered valid

reading material for children. Instead of considering *Sanmao* comic strips either as political images or as children's stories, I will analyze them by employing childhood as an analytical category with the aim of showing how Zhang Leping employed representations of children for political purposes, contributing to the popularization of contemporary political and intellectual discourse about children in China among adult and young readers.

Secondly, since the strips of the little hero were published almost without interruption between 1935 and 1962, an analysis of their content and the story of their production allows us to follow the political changes which took place in these thirty years through the development of one single cartoon character. Historians of Chinese cartoons tend to analyze the cartoons of a range of artists in a chronological fashion by highlighting the common trends and political ideas conveyed by these images. In my thesis I will follow the development of Zhang Leping's little hero over the years, with the aim of showing that although the artist's comic strips follow the main trends of contemporary cartoon art, they possessed unique features which distinguish them from the contemporary production of other cartoonists.

Finally, *Sanmao* was not created in a cultural vacuum, but numerous artists, intellectuals, educators and political figures contributed to the development and popularization of his image, an analysis of Zhang Leping's connections with several members of the left-wing intelligentsia can shed light on the agencies which propelled the change of *Sanmao*'s image over time. While historians interested in the production of Chinese cartoonists often analyze political images on the basis of debates which took place only among artists, a study of Zhang Leping's work shows that many other people besides cartoonists were active in the transformation and dissemination of the iconic figure of *Sanmao*. Furthermore, after 1949 the CCP cultural authorities electively appropriated and reshaped the image of *Sanmao* in order to adjust it to the party's political agenda. In the early years of the PRC, Zhang Leping contributed to the transformation the little hero *Sanmao* from a critic of politics and society into a supporter of the Communist Party and a model for the children of New China. To understand the enduring popularity of the image of *Sanmao*, it is necessary to study the factors which fostered the popularization of the little hero outside the comic strips themselves.

## CARTOONS, COMIC STRIPS AND PICTURE-STORY BOOKS: A DEFINITION

Visual images have long been considered reliable sources for historical research.<sup>1</sup> Given the central role of cartoons, comic strips and picture-story books in this thesis, it is essential to provide a definition of these terms. In this section, I will define the major technical terms I employ in my thesis (cartoons, comic strips, picture story books and also humour and satire), underling both the usefulness the limitations of these categories.

Cartoons and comic strips are not Chinese inventions, but these forms of graphic art entered China from Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century. Western scholars have worked on the theory and history of both cartoons and comic strips, and their scholarship is vital for an understanding of the aims and content of these two different forms of graphic art. The English word 'cartoon' originated from the Italian term *cartone*, a large piece of paper on which painters used to draw a preliminary sketch for their finished work.<sup>2</sup> This word highlights one of the main characteristics of a cartoon, which is normally composed of one panel, in which a single image conveys to the reader a specific message quickly and pungently.<sup>3</sup> According to historian of cartoon art Lawrence H. Streicher, cartoons mostly deal with political and social issues, with which the artist engages with the purpose of making a specific political message clear to the public.<sup>4</sup> To describe the incongruities and absurdities of human life, cartoonists often employ distortion and exaggeration. A successful cartoon communicates complex ideas to a large audience through caricature, popular stereotypes and metaphors often with satirical or humorous outcomes.<sup>5</sup> As pointed out by John Geipel, another historian of cartoon art, the term cartoon has lost its original meaning of satirical image; it has become an umbrella word for many kinds of illustration which present any form of physical distortion or exaggeration, which are not

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<sup>1</sup> See Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past: Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For the employment of images as historical source in the historiography of modern China see Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh ed., *History of Images: Pictures and Public Space in Modern China* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> John Geipel, *The Cartoon: A Short History of Graphic Comedy and Satire* (Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1972), 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Milton Kemnitz, "The Cartoon as a Historical Source," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 4, No.1, (1973): 81-93.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence H. Streicher, "On a Theory of Political Caricature," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.9, No.4 (July, 1967): 431-432.

<sup>5</sup> Streicher, "On a Theory of Political Caricature," 432.

necessary satirical or humorous.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, often comic strips are called 'cartoons', even if these two forms of graphic arts fulfil different aims.

The logic behind the production of a comic strip is rather different from that of cartoons. A comic strip is generally composed of a series of panels through which the adventures of a continuing character – or cast of characters – take place. These characters interact thanks to speech balloons or captions, often included within the panels.<sup>7</sup> While early comic strips were mainly humorous, in the 1930s the major American comic magazines featured the adventure stories of superheroes, like for instance *Superman* published for the first time by DC Comics in 1938.<sup>8</sup> These comic strips were not necessarily humorous, but they shared with earlier strips the attempt to tell a story of a character thanks to images, and eventually dialogues displayed in speech balloons. Therefore, while the main aim of a cartoon is to inform viewers about social or political issues through visual satire, comic strips are mainly considered as a form of entertainment normally based on humour, which may eventually provide readers with a satirical message.

While cartoons and comic strips pursued slightly different aims, their rise depended upon the introduction of new printing techniques, principally lithography, thanks to which they could be distributed in numerous copies.<sup>9</sup> According to Walter Benjamin, methods of mass reproduction destroy the 'aura', the historical uniqueness of a work of art.<sup>10</sup> Yet, even if they can be considered as art products, cartoons and comic strips are meant to exist in several copies, since their message is reinforced by mass-reproduction, to the point that, as Streicher pointed out, there is no difference between 'original' and 'copy' in cartoons.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars tend to associate cartoons with satirical content, while comic strips are generally considered humorous, but rarely satirical. What is the main difference between humour and

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<sup>6</sup> Geipel, *The Cartoon*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Robert C. Harvey, "The Aesthetic of the Comic Strip," *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 12 (1979):641.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 186.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and other Writings on Media*. (Cambridge; Massachu.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 23.

<sup>11</sup> Streicher, "On a Theory of Political Caricature," 433.

satire? The Oxford Dictionary defines humour as 'the quality of being amusing and comic'; while satire is 'the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule in order to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues'.<sup>12</sup> As cleverly pointed out by Jessica Milner Davis in her introduction to the volume *Humour in Chinese Life and Culture*, it is very difficult to find a general definition for the term humour, since 'the range of structure and media used to create humour and the modalities and messages conveyed are unlimited'. According to Davis, satire can be considered as one of different genres of humoristic production.<sup>13</sup> Generally, while both humour and satire imply the act of laughing, the aim of humour is to laugh gently at something, whereas satire aims at provoking laughter in order to criticize, attack and condemn something or somebody.

Western-style cartoons and comic strips became popular in China at the beginning of the twentieth century, and they shared several features with their western models. Like the term 'cartoon' in English, in China also cartoons and comics strips were often referred to as *manhua* 漫畫, a term believed to be a loan-word from the twentieth-century Japanese term *manga*.<sup>14</sup> The word *manhua* was introduced in China in 1925 by the magazine *Literature Weekly* (*Wenxue Zhoubao* 文學週報), which published cartoonist Feng Zikai's 豐子愷 (1898-1975) sketches, under the name of 'Zikai's *manhua*' (*Zikai Manhua*, 子凱漫畫). Feng Zikai said that his drawings had been inspired by the lyrical sketches – or *manga* – of the Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), and therefore he decided to call his images *manhua*.<sup>15</sup> As the word 'cartoon' in English, *manhua* became soon an umbrella term for several forms of graphic art: Feng's sketches, political cartoons, humoristic cartoons and comic strips. Yet, specific terminology describing different form of graphic production already existed in Chinese vocabulary, showing how artists distinguished between different *genres*.

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<sup>12</sup> Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Jocelyn Valerie Chey and Jessica Milner Davis, *Humour in Chinese Life and Culture: Resistance and Control in Modern China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Geremie Barmé, *An Artistic Exile: The Life of Feng Zikai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 93. The word *manga* became popular in Japan in 1814, when the artist Hokusai published his collection called *Hokusai Manga*.

<sup>15</sup> Barmé, *An Artistic Exile*, 93.

Single panel cartoons were called *danfu manhua* 單幅漫畫, and as in the case of their Western counterparts, they engaged with political and social issues which they presented to readers in a sardonic tone. In contrast, comic strips were known as *lianhuan manhua* 連環漫畫, and they were considered as a form of entertainment for the urban public. There is also a third kind of graphic art often associated with cartoon and comic strip production in China, *lianhuanhua* 連環畫 or picture-story books. *Lianhuanhua* were illustrated booklets very fashionable in Shanghai from the early 1920s. These booklets were illustrated narrations mostly of traditional stories, where plates showing the most important scenes of the narrative were matched with short texts describing the event taking place in the image. Generally, readers already knew the content of the story therefore the illiterate could also enjoy looking at the illustrations. While cartoons and comic strips were published on magazines and newspapers, *lianhuanhua* were sold as books, or they could be rented for a small sum from stalls placed on the streets.<sup>16</sup> Often, successful comic strips published serially in newspapers or magazines were collected and sold as booklets very similar to *lianhuanhua*, from which they borrow the name: *manhua* picture-story books (*manhua lianhuanhua*, 漫畫連環畫).<sup>17</sup>

These analytical categories employed by scholars are necessary to describe, analyze and study Chinese cartoon production. Nevertheless, sometimes these definitions can be too rigid. To speak of cartoons, comic strips and picture-story books as separate art forms is somewhat misleading. For instance, Zhang Leping's *Sanmao* is not easy to categorize into one of these three categories. When Zhang Leping started drawing *Sanmao* in 1935, his images could easily be defined as comic strips, since they were composed by multiple panels and they told light-hearted humorous stories about the same character. However, Zhang Leping's style changed greatly through the years. His most famous comic serials, *Sanmao Joins the Army* and *The Wandering Life*, cannot be considered simply as humorous tales, while many of his strips were actually single panels sharing several features with political cartoons. These two serials were more satirical than just funny, even if neither of these two categories appropriately described the feelings transmitted by *Sanmao*'s story.

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<sup>16</sup> Kuiyi Shen, "Lianhuanhua and Manhua- Picture Books and Comics in Old Shanghai," in *Illustrating Asia: Comics, Humour, Magazines, and Picture Books*, ed. John Lent (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 100-120.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Yi Ke 一可, Wei Ming 未名 and Wang Jun 王軍, *Xiaorenshe de lishi* 小人書的歷史 [History of Picture Story Books] (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2008), 2-18.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF CARTOONS AND COMIC STRIPS IN CHINA 1920s-1950s

Western-style cartoons and comic strips became popular in China around the 1920s, although satirical images had already been produced in China in the late years of the Qing dynasty.<sup>18</sup> The rise of these forms of graphic art must be analyzed in the context of the process of technical and cultural modernization which took place in China between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, when the progressive collapse of the empire and the presence of western forces in China impelled intellectuals and politicians to find a way to modernize the country to protect it from foreign colonialism. In this process, western technologies, but also political ideas and art forms, were introduced into China.

The success of cartoons would have never been possible without the introduction of new printing techniques (notably lithography) in the country and the influence of Western art on young Chinese artists. Thanks to both camera and printing press, images and photos became very popular among city dwellers, while newspaper and magazines massively employed pictures, illustrations and cartoons in order to attract readers.<sup>19</sup> Illustrated magazines (*huabao*, 畫報) became popular among the public, providing their readers with a new visual representation of the contemporary world. By the 1920s, city dwellers' daily life was invaded with images of every kind. It was in these years that advertisements, photos, cinema, cartoons and comics became an essential part of urban reality. Illustrated advertisements, mostly representing smiling 'modern girls', appeared in the press and also in public spaces.<sup>20</sup> Streets, shops and even private houses gradually became places for the display of advertisements, which were often loved by the public for their decorative potential and aesthetic qualities. Chinese citizens in urban areas became more and more familiar with visual forms of entertainment, among them cartoons and comic strips.

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<sup>18</sup> Bi Keguan 畢尅官 and Huang Yuanlin 黃遠林, *Zhongguo manhua shi* 中國漫畫史 [History of Chinese Cartoons] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006). 18-37.

<sup>19</sup> Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh ed., *History in Images: Pictures and Public Sapce in Modern China* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, Univerity of California 2012), 1.

<sup>20</sup> For an enquiry into the nature of the 'Chinese Modern Girl' see Madeleine Y. Dong, "Who is Afraid of the Modern Girl?," in *The Modern Girl Around the World*, ed. Alys Eve Weinbaum (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 194-219. On the use of images for commercial purposes see Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).



To understand cartoons and comics, the public had to be able to appreciate their humor and satirical content. It was not the case that the visual turn in Chinese popular culture coincided with the rise of humour as a recognized cultural phenomenon among Chinese intellectuals. The word *youmo* 幽默 – from the European term *humour* – was introduced in China in 1924 by the writer and translator Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895-1976), who through his popular magazine *Analects Fortnightly* (*Lunyu Banyue kan*, 論語半月刊) contributed to the development of humour (*youmo zhuyi*, 幽默主義) as a cultural phenomenon in urban China in the 1930s.<sup>21</sup> In 1934 and 1935, Lin Yutang help to launch two other humor magazines *This Human World* (*Renjian shi*, 人間世) and *Cosmic Wind* (*Youzhou feng*, 宇宙風) which invaded the publishing market of urban China, while humour – in all its forms – was one of the most successful modes of expression of the new comic culture which spread across China in the Republican time.<sup>22</sup>

Although the word humour was introduced in China only in the 1920s, a culture of laughter was present in Chinese cultural production before the concept of humour was established in the country. In his research on the development of Chinese comic culture during the twentieth century, Christopher Rea pointed out that the western concept of humour substituted for a more established comic form, the *huaji* 滑稽 – literally "funny talk" – which was a cultural form that extended across several genres.<sup>23</sup> *Huaji* started as a form of witty performance, but during the Qing time, this term became a synonymous with anything funny.<sup>24</sup> Li Yutang considered the way in which Chinese people laugh and what they laugh were also indicative of Chinese national character.<sup>25</sup> He introduced 'humour; in order to displace *huaji*, which he considered inadequate to meet the modern challenges that the Chinese people faced.<sup>26</sup> According to Sohigian, the main difference between *huaji* and humour was that while the first one was synonymous with anything

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher G. Rea, "Comedy and Cultural Entrepreneurship in Xu Zhudai's *Huaji* Shanghai," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol. 20, No.2 (2008): 47. For more information of Lin Yutang and his work see Qian Suoqiao, *Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Sohigian, "Contagion of Laughter," 138.

<sup>23</sup> Rea, "Comedy and Cultural Entrepreneurship," 42.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher G. Rea, "A History of Laughter: Comic Culture in Early Twentieth Century China," (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2008): 22-23.

<sup>26</sup> Diran John Sohigian, "Contagion of Laughter: The Rise of the Humor Phenomenon in Shanghai in the 1930s," *East Asian Culture Critique*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2007):138-139.

funny, humour was supposed to induce the public to 'thoughtful laughter'.<sup>27</sup> Despite Li Yutang's attempt, however, *huaji* culture did not disappear from Chinese popular culture, and remained popular among the population.

The success of humour attracted the attention of several well-known intellectuals – such as Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936) and Lao She 老舍 (1899-1966) – who started a debate about the social function of humour in a period of national crisis.<sup>28</sup> These debates about humour which took place among Chinese intellectuals in the 1930s are analyzed by Diran J. Sohigian in an article dedicated to the rise of the humour phenomenon in China. While, as we have seen, Lin Yutang promoted humour as a modern and cultivated form of expression, Lu Xun believed that it was inadequate form of expression for a population fighting against foreign colonialism.<sup>29</sup> According to Lu Xun, satire (*fengci*, 諷刺) had to be privileged over humour by Chinese intellectuals and artists for its capacity to reveal the truth and push people to think about reality. He dismissed humour as banal laughter, but saw in satire a tool to reform the country. In contrast, novelist Lao She criticized satire for promoting violence by encouraging the audience to lose any form of compassion for the victim of the satirical attack.<sup>30</sup>

Intellectuals' doubts about the employment of humouristic tones in contemporary literature did not impede the rise of humour as an essential component of the emerging mass entertainment industry. Commercial periodicals, such as magazines and tabloids, were the means through which the new comic culture was propagated among city dwellers. By the 1920s, the urban readership was composed not only of literati, but also of the middle classes and petty urbanites (*xiao shimin*, 小市民), whose preference for jokes and easy reading expanded the market in humorous magazines and the new forms of visual culture more generally, such as cartoons, comic strips and cinema. The growing readership of the popular press meant that humorous publications made money. Cartoons and comic strips, moreover, commented on contemporary Chinese urban life, playing on motifs typical of Republican visual culture, such as erotic imagery,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 140. See also Harriet C. Mills, "Lu Xun: Literature and Revolution-from Mara to Marx," in *Modern Chinese Literature in May Fourth Era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 220.

<sup>30</sup> Sohigian, "Contagion of Laughter," 144.

modern urban life and new fashion trends.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, although humour was promoted as modern comic culture, the urban masses still enjoyed more traditional *huaji* forms, which often appeared in comic strips, films and novels.<sup>32</sup>

Chinese cartoonists drew inspiration from the images of Western artists – such as Honoré Daumier (1808-1879), George Grosz (1893-1959), Miguel Covarrubias (1904-1957) and David Low (1891-1963) – whose work was introduced into China in the 1920s.<sup>33</sup> The rise of these specific forms of visual culture was linked to the flourishing of influential magazines that specialized in the publication of humoristic and satirical images, such as *Oriental Puck* (*Duli Manhua*, 獨立漫畫), *Shanghai Sketch* (*Shanghai Manhua*, 上海漫畫), *Modern Sketch* (*Shidai Manhua*, 時代漫畫) and *Modern Puck* (*Manhua Jie*, 漫畫界) published in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>34</sup> Soon, cartoons and comic strips became ubiquitous in newspapers, magazines and pictorials, becoming one of the most widespread forms of popular entertainment. It was in this context that cartoon heroes such as Ye Qianyu's 葉淺予 (1907-1995) Mr. Wang 王先生, Huang Yao 黃堯's (1914-1987) Bull Nose (*Niu Bizi*, 牛鼻) as well as Liang Baibo's 樑白波 (1911-1987) Miss Honey (*Mifeng Xiaojie*, 蜜蜂小姐), and Gao Longsheng's 高龍生 *Ah Dou* (*Ah Dou*, 阿鬥) and of course Zhang Leping's little hero Sanmao became popular in urban China.

While cartoons published in the early 1930s are generally analyzed in the context of the developing commercialization of urban entertainment, many of the same cartoonists also published politically and socially engaged cartoons. However, with the onset of the Sino-Japanese War the politicization of cartoons became striking. During the war some of the most popular Chinese cartoonists put art at the service of government propaganda, turning their images from sources of entertainment into weapons against the Japanese invaders.<sup>35</sup> Japanese

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<sup>31</sup> See for instance Yingjin Zhang, "The Corporeality of Erotic Imagination: a Study of Pictorials and Cartoons in Republican China," in *Illustrating Asia: Comics, Humour, Magazines, and Picture Books*, ed. John Lent, 121-136.

<sup>32</sup> Rea, "Comedy and Cultural Entrepreneurship," 40-91.

<sup>33</sup> Chang-tai Hung, "The Fuming Image: Cartoons and Public Opinion in late Republican China, 1945 to 1949," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Jan. 1994): 124.

<sup>34</sup> *Shanghai Sketch* and *Modern Sketch* were the same magazine, but in 1930 *Shanghai Sketch* had to change name because of copyright problems.

<sup>35</sup> Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China 1937-1945* (University of California Press, 1994), 94-151. Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhua lishi*, 158-188.

soldiers were often depicted as ferocious monsters, while the Chinese resisters appeared as heroes ready to sacrifice their life for their country. During the war years, the humorous content typical of the images of the 1930s gave way to more dramatic content. Humour gave way to dark satire, mostly used in order to criticize the invaders. Many cartoons dwelt on the brutality of the Japanese soldiers, often employing realistic portrayals of bloody events to metaphorical descriptions of the profanation of the country. It was during the War of Resistance that some cartoonists decided to join the CCP in Yan'an, where they not only carried on producing anti-Japanese images, but also cartoons derogatory of the Nationalist Government.<sup>36</sup> Some artists also remained in Yan'an also after the end of the war, while others came back to Shanghai, which resumed being the main center for Chinese publishing houses. During the years of the Civil War (1946-1949), several cartoonists became very critical towards the Nationalist Government, expressing their disappointment with the country's post war situation through their art.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, Communist cartoonists intensified their anti-Nationalist production, especially through biting caricatures of the leader Chiang Kai-shek.

The establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 signaled the progressive subjugation of visual arts to the party's propaganda purposes. The most striking change between pre- and post-1949 cartoons was the complete regulation of the themes, purposes and even style of the production of new images. Humour did not disappear completely from cartoons and strips produced during the 1950s, but satire was promoted by party authorities as a mode of expression in graphic arts. Artists were encouraged to employ satirical tones in order to criticize the enemies of the party. After a period of freedom of speech during the Hundred Flowers Movement in 1956-1957 and the following suppression and purges of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, cartoonists definitively adjust their work to the CCP's regulations becoming supporters of the party.<sup>38</sup>

## **A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CHINESE CARTOON PRODUCTION**

The history of the development of Chinese cartoons through the twentieth century has attracted the attention of many scholars, who have tried to identify the general trends which distinguished

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<sup>36</sup> Bi and Huang, *Zhongguo manhua lishi*, 207-216.

<sup>37</sup> Hung, "The Fuming Image," 123.

<sup>38</sup> Jennifer Altehenger, "A Socialist Satire: *Manhua* Magazine and Political Cartoon Production in the PRC: 1950-1960," *Frontiers of History of China*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2013): 78-103.

cartoon production in different historical periods. The most influential Chinese works on the production, content and influence of cartoons in China are Bi Keguan 畢尅官 and Huang Yuanlin's 黃遠林 *History of Chinese Cartoons* (*Zhongguo manhua shi* 中國漫畫史,) and the identically titled book of Gan Xianfeng 甘險峰.<sup>39</sup> Contemporary Chinese historiography divides cartoon production into four main periods: the rise of entertaining cartoons in the 1930s; the politicization of visual arts during the War of Resistance (1937-1945); the political production of the civil war years (1945-1949), and finally the CCP's employment of cartoon art for the education of the population to socialist ideology (1949-1966). Both the volumes of *History of Chinese Cartoons* followed this chronological division, which has also been employed by Western scholars in the analysis of cartoon production in China. These two books are precious source of information about the life and work of many Chinese cartoonists. Furthermore, they offer a reliable account of the major debates which surrounded the production of cartoons and comic strips in specific historical moments. Although the two *History of Chinese Cartoons*, and in particular the version of Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin, are still the main source of information for historians interested in the development of cartoon art in China, these two works are not devoid of shortcomings. One of the major problems is that they are extremely politicized. They focus almost exclusively on political satire, while almost completely ignoring humorous images, popular before 1949. Furthermore, they privilege the work of cartoonists who supported the CCP. Chinese as well as Western historiography tends to privilege an analysis of the work of those cartoonists who either worked for the CCP before 1949 or who dared to criticize the Nationalist government before the establishment of the PRC. Other cartoonists are mentioned, but often their work is not well studied. Despite these shortcomings, these two books remain the most complete accounts of cartoon production in twentieth century China. A similar approach and historical division can be seen in Yi Ke 一可, Wei Ming 未名 and Wang Jun's 王軍 *History of Picture Story Books* (*Xiaorensu de Lishi*, 小人書的歷史), a volume which describes the development of *lianhuanhua* in China in the twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> Also in this case, politically engaged works are given priority over less engaged stories.

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<sup>39</sup> Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin, *Zhongguo manhua shi*; Gan Xianfeng 甘險峰, *Zhongguo manhua shi* 中國漫畫史 [History of Chinese Cartoons] (Jinan: Shandong huabao chubanshe, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Yi Ke, Wei Ming and Wang Jun, *Xiaorensu de lishi*.

The two *History of Chinese Cartoons* are not the only Chinese works about cartoons; another work of interest is Huang Ke's 黄可 *Cartoons from Old Shanghai* (*Lao Shanghai Manhua Tuzhi* 老上海漫畫圖誌), an account of the development of cartoons in Shanghai between the 1920s and 1949.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the two *History of Chinese Cartoons*, this book does not only focus on the political cartoons, but also analyzes the work of cartoonists in the flourishing entertaining industry of the metropolis. For instance, Huang Ke provides his readers with relevant information about the rise of comic heroes such as Ye Qianyu's Mr. Wang, Huang Yao's Bull Nose and Zhang Leping's Sanmao. Rich in images and informative details about the life and production of many artists, this book brilliantly shows how cartoonists specialized in several fields of visual art, like advertising, *lianhuanhua* and illustrations for books, which helps readers to understand that political satire was only one of the interests of these artists.

While the two *History of Chinese Cartoons* and *Cartoons from Old Shanghai* offer an overview of the production of several artists, historian Shen Jianzhong 沈建中 specialized in editing collections from specific cartoon magazines, such as *Modern Sketch* (*Shidai Manhua*, 時代漫畫) and *Resistance Cartoons* (*Kangzhan Manhua*, 抗戰漫畫).<sup>42</sup> These collections are very useful, since they allow scholars a better sense of the content and style of specific magazines. Furthermore, Shen Jianzhong's collections allow scholars to easily access images otherwise not readily accessible because of the poor state of preservation of the original copies of the magazines. Besides collections of images and texts from specialist magazines, in the last ten years many works of scholarship on the work and life of individual artists have appeared on the market. For instance, in 2004 a series of books containing the major works and writings of several cartoonists such as Ye Qianyu, and Zhang Leping were published under the title of *My Life in Cartoons* (*Wo de manhua shenghuo* 我的漫畫生活), followed by the name of the artist whose work is analyzed in the volume.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Huang Ke 黄可, Gan Zhenhu 甘振虎 Chen Lei 陳蕾 ed., *Lao Shanghai manhua tuzhi* 老上海漫畫圖誌 [Cartoons from Old Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Shen Jianzhong 沈建中, *Kangzhan manhua* 抗戰漫畫 [Resistance Cartoons] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2005). Shen Jianzhong 沈建中 *Shidai manhua* 時代漫畫 [Modern Sketch] Vol. 1-2 (Shanghai: Shanghai xuehui kexue chubanshe, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> See for instance Ye Qianyu 葉淺予, *Ye Qianyu: wo de manhua shenghuo*, 葉淺予:我的漫畫生活 [Ye Qianyu: My Life in Cartoons] (Beijing: Zhongguo luyou chubanshe, 2007).

In western scholarship, cartoons have recently become the subject of specialized historical research. The most complete overview of the history of Chinese comic art in the English language is John Lent's essay in Wu Ding and Patrick D. Murphy's *Handbook of Chinese Popular Culture*. While his essay is mostly based on the information provided by Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin's *History of Chinese Cartoons*, Lent has added general historical references to the personal stories of famous cartoonists. Furthermore, the essay describes cartoon production in China until 1989.<sup>44</sup> In a series of books and articles, the historian of popular culture, Chang-tai Hung, has provided a survey of Chinese cartoon production, starting from the War of Resistance and going into the early years of the People's Republic, that maps the changing content, style and themes of cartoons produced in this period. In *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China 1937-1945*, Hung dedicates a chapter to the process of politicization of the cartoon genre during the War of Resistance, when cartoonists adapted their work to the new exigencies of war and to a new rural audience not familiar with this urban form of graphic art. Hung describes how Chinese cartoonists decided to participate in the propaganda campaign promoted by the Nationalist government and how they transformed their cartoons from an urban form of entertainment into propagandistic tools aimed at uniting the population against the Japanese invaders.<sup>45</sup> In the article "The Fuming Image: Cartoons and Public Opinion in Late Republican China, 1945-1949", Hung continued his analysis of Chinese cartoons, this time focusing on the work of cartoonists during the Civil War. In these years, cartoonists aired their dissatisfaction with the political, social and economic condition of their country. According to Hung, it was during the Civil War that Chinese cartoonists became opinion makers, able to influence the population in relation to the contemporary political struggle.<sup>46</sup> Finally, Hung has also studied Chinese cartoons and *lianhuanhua* production during the early years of the PRC, when the CCP regulated the themes and style of cartoons, which became tools aimed at criticizing internal and external enemies.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> John Lent, "Comic Art," in *Handbook of Chinese Popular Culture*, ed. Patrick D. Murphy and Wu Dingbo (Westport, Conn; London: Greenwood Press, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 94-151.

<sup>46</sup> Hung, "The Fuming Image," 122-145.

<sup>47</sup> Hung Chang-tai, *Mao's New World: Political Culture in the Early People's Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 155-171.

Other historians have written on more particular aspects of cartoon production in republican and Communist China. Christopher Rea analyzed Ye Qianyu's *Mr. Wang* popular comic strips in the context of the rising popularity of humoristic forms of entertainment in urban China during the 1920s-1930s.<sup>48</sup> Louise Edwards studied how women were portrayed in propaganda cartoons during the War of Resistance, while Barak Kushner analyzed how throughout the twentieth century cartoonists produced stereotyped and humoristic representations of Japanese soldiers, often adjusting their images to contemporary political conditions.<sup>49</sup> As for the early years of the PRC, Jennifer Altehenger has shown how cartoonists had to adapt to the CCP's rules on art through an analysis of the history of the magazine *Manhua* during the 1950s.<sup>50</sup> Scholarship dedicated to specific artists is still rare, with the exception of cartoonist Feng Zikai, whose work has attracted the attention of several historians, including Geremie Barmé, Christoph Harbsmeier and Hung.<sup>51</sup> Scholarly interest in Feng Zikai is based also on his diverse artistic production: he was not only a cartoonist, but also a scholar educated in both Chinese and Western art, a prolific essayist, a calligrapher and a musician. Besides his sophisticated cartoons, Feng Zikai left hundreds of essays and private letters, a precious source of information about the artist's thoughts and personal life. Furthermore, Feng Zikai's work reflected his personal interest in Buddhism, one of the characteristics that made his images stand out from the production of other contemporary cartoonists.

While the content of Zhang Leping's most popular comic serial *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* has been analyzed by both Chinese and Western scholars, a complete study of the artist's work has not been undertaken yet. There are several works on Zhang Leping's life and work in the Chinese language. Some cover the entire life and production of Zhang Leping from the 1930s up to the 1990s, while others focus on specific periods. One of the best documented works about the

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<sup>48</sup> Rea, "A History of Laughter," 215-249.

<sup>49</sup> Louise Edwards, "Drawing Sexual Violence in Wartime China: Anti-Japanese Propaganda Cartoons," *The Journal of Asian Studies* (June, 2013): 1-24; Barak Kushner, "Unwarranted attention: The Image of Japan in Twentieth-century Chinese Humor," in *Humour in Chinese Life and Culture: Resistance and Control in Modern Times*, Jessica Milner Davis and Jocelyn Chey ed. (Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 47-80.

<sup>50</sup> Altehenger, "A Socialist Satire," 78-103. See also Andreas Seifert, *Bildgeschichten für Chinas Massen: Comic und Comicproduktion im 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: Böhlau, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Christoph Harbsmeier, *The Cartoonist Feng Zikai: Social Realism with a Buddhist Face* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget; Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984). Chang-tai Hung, "War and Peace in Feng Zikai's Wartime Cartoons," *Modern China*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Jan., 1990): 39-83. Zhang Bin 張斌, *Feng Zikai shihua* 豐子愷詩畫 [The Poetic Flavor in Feng Zikai's Paintings] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu Chubanshe, 2007).



artist's life and work is his wife Feng Chuyin's 馮雛音 *Forever Sanmao* (*Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 永遠的三毛), a book which covers the whole life and production of the artist. This is the only book which includes information about all the changes applied to *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* after 1949.<sup>52</sup> Also Yang Guo's *One hundred years of Zhang Leping* (*Bainian Leping* 百季樂平) is also an overview of the artist's life and work. Interestingly, this book has a section completely dedicated to Zhang Leping's writings, and it republishes several articles about the artist published on several newspapers over the years.<sup>53</sup> While these two works aim to give a complete overview of the artist's production, other books focus on specific historical periods. For instance, Ding Yanzhao 丁言昭 and Yu Zhi's 余之 *Shanghai Memory: The 1930s under Zhang Leping's Brush* (*Zhang Leping Huabi Xia de Sanshi Niandai*, 上海 *Memory: 張樂平畫筆下的三十年代*) is a collection of Zhang Leping's early cartoons, commercials and strips, combined with the description of the cartoonist's work experience in Shanghai in the early 1930s.<sup>54</sup> A very interesting work is Qiu Yue 邱悅 and Zhang Weijun's 張慰軍 (Zhang Leping's younger son) *The Father of San Mao goes to War* (*Sanmao Zhi Ye Cong Junji*, 三毛之爺從軍記), which provides readers with much information about the artist's life during the War of Resistance through his memories, pictures, cartoons and also articles about him published in different newspapers and magazines during the war.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the most complete collection of Zhang Leping's drawings is Zhang Qiming's 張奇明 *Sanmao's Father Zhang Leping* (*Sanmao zhi fu Zhang Leping* 三毛之父張樂平), where it is possible to find not only Zhang Leping's most famous cartoons, but also his color plates, *nianhua* and illustrations for children's magazines.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Feng Chuyin 馮雛音, *Yongyuan de Sanmao* 永遠的三毛 [Forever Sanmao] (Nanjing: Yilin chubanshe, 2006). Zhang Leping 張樂平, *Zhang Leping: wo de manhua shenghuo* 張樂平: 我的漫畫生活 [Zhang Leping: My Life in Cartoons] (Beijing: Zhongguo luyou chubanshe, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> Yang Guo 楊國, *Bainian Leping* 百季樂平 [One Hundred Years of Zhang Leping] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Ding Yanzhao 丁言昭 and Yu Zhi 余之, *Shanghai Memory: Zhang Leping huabi xia de sanshi niandai* 上海 *Memory: 張樂平畫筆下的三十年代* [Shanghai Memory: the 1930s under Zhang Leping's Brush] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> Qiu Yue 邱悅 and Zhang Weijun 張慰軍, *Sanmao zhi ye cong jun ji* 三毛之爺從軍記 [The Father of Sanmao Joins the Army] (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu wenxuan chubanshe, 2007).

<sup>56</sup> Zhang Qiming 張奇明 ed., *Sanmao zhi fu Zhang Leping* 三毛之父張樂平 [Sanmao's Father Zhang Leping] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005).

The content of Zhang Leping's *Sanmao* comic strips has been the subject of research in the West. Most of the time, the comic serials of Sanmao have mostly been analyzed in the context of twentieth-century Chinese children's literature. This is the case of Mary Ann Farquhar's *Children's Literature in China: From Lu Xun to Mao Zedong*, which analyzes the development of modern children's literature in China between 1919 and 1976.<sup>57</sup> In her work, Farquhar quotes Sanmao strips as one of the most popular *lianhuanhua* for children in pre-Liberation China, by explaining how through his strips Zhang Leping contributed to the popularization of political ideas among child readers. The contribution of Zhang Leping to children's literature is also at the center of an article entitled "The Wandering Life of Sanmao", in which the writers point out how Sanmao was a real revolutionary character, since his actions subverted the traditional Confucian habit of respect for the elders and public authorities, and point out how the child was used to criticize society.<sup>58</sup> In particular, Zhang Leping's comics were often employed to comment upon the life of orphans, as pointed out in Xi Lanjun's PhD thesis 'Save the Children: Problem Childhood and Narrative Politics in Twentieth Century Chinese Literature', in which the strips of *The Wandering Life* are analyzed in the context of the rise of literature about orphans in China.<sup>59</sup>

The attempt of historians to classify the most popular trends in comic art in specific historical periods is very useful in providing a solid basis for the analysis of visual culture. The few works that describe the production of single artists generally follow this historical division. However, while generalization about trends is necessary, this approach tends to flatten out the differences between the production of different artists. Geremie Bermé's biography of acclaimed artist Feng Zikai is one of the few successful cases in which the author manages to merge the description of the cartoonist's unique style with the historical background and contemporary cartoon production.<sup>60</sup> In line with this, my thesis attempts to show how Zhang Leping's work partially conforming to the general lines of changing cartoon production, still maintained a very distinct style and content. While it is useful to describe the general artistic trends which distinguished a specific historical period, it is important not to follow into generalization.

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<sup>57</sup> Mary Ann Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China: from Lu Xun to Mao Zedong* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Rosen, Bock and Ching-lan, "The Wandering Life of Sanmao," *Children's Literature*, Vol.15 (1987): 120-138.

<sup>59</sup> Xu Lanjun, "Save the Children: Problem Childhoods and Narrative Politics in Twentieth-century Chinese Literature" (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Barmé, *An Artistic Exile*.

## THE HISTORY OF CHILDREN IN CHINA: A HISTORIOGRAPHY

From its first appearance in 1935, the content and aims of Sanmao comic strips changed immensely. Children always remained the main subjects of Zhang Leping's strips. Furthermore, as proven by the artist's constant reference to his young followers in his writings, children were also assiduous readers of Sanmao's adventures. For these reasons, Zhang Leping's comic books are often considered as masterpieces of Chinese children's literature. Historians have considered *Sanmao* strips either as a product of political graphic art or as reading material for children. Since in this thesis I will analyze how Zhang Leping's strips popularize contemporary discursive ideas about children in China, a brief overview of the main works on the history of children and children's literature in China is necessary to highlight the contribution of this thesis in these two fields.

The origin of the historical study of children is associated with the publication of Philippe Ariès' pioneering and provocative work, *Centuries of Childhood*, in which the historian discussed the rise of the concept of childhood from the medieval age up to the twentieth century. According to Ariès, childhood as a concept did not exist in medieval times, when children were considered as little adults, but he has claimed the idea of childhood as a specific time in the life of a person emerged through the centuries and was institutionalized only in the nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>61</sup> Although the theory of Ariès has been criticized by several historians, his work is still considered the turning point for the study of the history of children. Scholarship on the history of children can be divided into two main categories: that which studies the social experience of flesh and blood children and that which analyzes the discursive construction of childhood. In this sense, it is possible to distinguish between the study of 'children' as the young section of the population from the study of 'childhood', a term that refers to the philosophical, cultural and social understanding of a specific phase of human experience.<sup>62</sup> While historians distinguish between the history of real children and the development of their representation, it is nevertheless true that ideas and theories of adults about childhood had concrete effects on children's everyday life.

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<sup>61</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973).

<sup>62</sup> Ping-chen Hsiung, *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005): 15.

One of the major problems for historians is to define the borders of childhood. While often the passage to adulthood is often defined by the legal code of a specific country, scholars can decide to limit their research to children that have not reached puberty, since puberty may be considered a different time in a person's life. The different borders assigned by scholars to childhood can influence the approach and content of scholarship: for instance, those scholars who decide to take into consideration the teenage years can rely on diaries and letters written by the protagonists of their research, a privilege rarely granted to those who analyze early childhood. This division is common also in the studies of childhood in China.

There are few works dedicated to the history of children in China. Some primary sources about children's culture and life have been published: for instance, one of the few examples is a social survey about the condition of children, originally conducted in 1934. The survey is rich in data about the living conditions of indigent children in Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai, Chengdu and Fuzhou, with a specific focus on the problem of juvenile criminalization.<sup>63</sup> Also the volumes of general history on specific cities or provinces provide readers with statistics about children, especially about welfare and education.<sup>64</sup> An useful study on the publication of specialized magazines for children in Shanghai is Jian Ping's 简平 *A Short History of Children's Periodicals in Shanghai* (*Shanghai shaonian ertong baokan jianshi* 上海少年兒童報刊簡史), which follows the development of children's literature in China by briefly presenting the story of the major specialist publications in Shanghai.<sup>65</sup>

In recent years there has been a flourishing of scholarship in English about this subject. Anne Behnke Kinney's edited volume *Chinese Views on Childhood* is perhaps the richest overview of the history of children in China.<sup>66</sup> This book covers several subjects – childbirth, infanticide, memoirs of famous scholars and the work relief institutions just to mention just some – starting

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<sup>63</sup>Li Wenhai 李文海, *Minguo shiqi shehui diaocha cong bian: dibian shehui juan* 民國時期社會調查叢編:底邊社會卷 [Series of edited books of the social surveys of Republican China: volumes of the lower part of society] (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005).

<sup>64</sup> See for instance Xu Ming 许敏 and Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, *Shanghai tongshi minguo wenhua*, Juan 10 上海通史民國文化 10 卷, [Shanghai General History Culture of Republic of China Vol.10](Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1996).

<sup>65</sup>Jian Ping 简平, *Shanghai shaonian ertong baokan jianshi* 上海少年兒童報刊簡史 [A Short History of Children Periodicals in Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shaonian ertong Press, 2010).

<sup>66</sup>Anne Behnke Kinney, *Chinese Views of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

from the Han dynasty up to the twentieth century. Kinney is also the author of a study on the representations of children and the evolution of the concept of childhood in early modern China.<sup>67</sup> While Kinney focused mostly on early Chinese history, scholar Hsiung Ping-chen's *A Tender Voyage* has the ambitious aim of presenting the physical conditions and social reality in which children lived in late imperial China.<sup>68</sup> This monograph analyzes both the development of the idea of childhood and the concrete life of children during the late years of the Qing Dynasty, taking into consideration also issues relating to gender and class. Another influential study centered on the same historical period is Bai Limin's *Shaping the Ideal Child*, an analysis of China's education system based on the content of the most used primers.<sup>69</sup> Although, as pointed out by Hsiung, the conceptualization of childhood and children in historiography about pre-modern China is quite imprecise, this research has discarded Ariès's thesis that children did not occupy a special place in society before modern times.<sup>70</sup> While the subject of the development of the concept of childhood in pre-modern China still needs systematic investigation, from these works it appears that childhood was considered to be a specific period in the life of a person.

The growing literature about the Chinese history of childhood is mostly connected with the rise of the figure of the child in public discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century. Children became the center of attention for those intellectuals who at the beginning of the century hoped for a better future for the country. In the early twentieth century, children were assigned the difficult and often daunting task of growing up as modern Chinese citizens, able to challenge and overcome foreign powers encroaching on China. Children's education was the first area to undergo radical reform in the attempt to strengthen the country as early as the final years of the Qing Dynasty, when Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) saw the improvement of education as the best method to save China from foreign occupation. Claiming that rote memorization in the education system was the cause of Chinese backwardness in science and technology, Liang promoted the introduction of Western education techniques, and emphasized how a synthesis

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<sup>67</sup> Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>68</sup> Ping-chen Hsiung, *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>69</sup> Bai Limin, *Shaping the Ideal Child: Children and their Primers in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> Hsiung, *A Tender Voyage*, 7.

between Chinese and Western forms of learning could solve the backwardness of the country.<sup>71</sup> After the establishment of the Republic in 1912, several other Chinese intellectuals promoted the introduction of Western methods in order to reform children's education. The modernizing forces that influenced the production of graphic art in China's urban centers affected also the way in which intellectuals thought about children and childhood.

One of the most influential works on the development of the idea of childhood in twentieth century China is Andrew F. Jones's *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture*, in which the author describes, mostly through literary examples, how Social Darwinism was understood and communicated in Republican China.<sup>72</sup> Two sections of this book are completely dedicated to intellectuals' and politicians' new interest in child psychology and child development, topics intensely connected with the development of China as a modern and independent nation. According to Jones, children became significant figures in China between 1917 and 1937 when May Fourth intellectuals, influenced by evolutionary thinking, elected 'the child' as a central figure for the modernization of the country.<sup>73</sup> Following Lu Xun's celebrated slogan 'Save the children!' they tried to end the transmission of Confucian culture in the young generation, employing new strategies for the development of children's education, literature and family environment.<sup>74</sup> In popular media, children were represented as agents of national redemption, and their physical and intellectual development was associated with the success of the Chinese nation. During the republican era, these new ideas about child development fostered the production of new textbooks for children's education, but also of toys, medicine and specialized products. Only by consuming 'national products', could children develop into modern Chinese citizens guaranteeing the survival and regeneration of the country.

As we have seen, education was considered the key element for forming Chinese children into modern citizens able to strengthen China so that it could stand up to the foreign presence inside

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew F. Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>73</sup> The concept of Evolution and Social Darwinism spread in China at the end of the nineteenth century through the translation of the famous scholar Yan Fu 严复 (1854-1921) of Thomas Huxley's (1825-1895) work *Evolution and Ethics*.

<sup>74</sup> Lu Xun, *A Madman's Diary* (*Kuangren riji*, 狂人日记), 1918.

and outside the country. At the beginning of the twentieth century innovative ideas about education were being explored by Chinese intellectuals. For instance, John Dewey's (1859-1952) theories on progressive education deeply influenced the work and ideas of several Chinese educators. Progressive education, a pedagogical movement that began at the end of the nineteenth century, was an attempt to change the traditional curriculum of education in order to help children to understand and analyze the contemporary world, preparing them for their future role in society. One of the most active supporters of progressive education in China was Chen Heqin 陳鶴琴 (1892-1982), who worked with John Dewey at the Teachers College of Columbia University between 1916 and 1918.<sup>75</sup> He was only one of many Chinese followers of Dewey's pedagogical and political theory. Also the Chinese philosopher Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962) also studied at the Teachers College, and he was the main organizer of Dewey's lecture series in China between 1919 and 1921.<sup>76</sup>

Besides pedagogy, children's literature also became a subject of discussion among reformers. The most complete research about the production of a new children's literature in twentieth century China, is Mary Ann Farquhar's *Children's Literature in China: From Lu Xun to Mao Zedong*, which analyzes the political thought on which the major works for children produced between 1919 and 1976 were based.<sup>77</sup> As pointed out by Farquhar, intellectuals had diverse opinions about the content and aims of children's literature. Furthermore, these ideas changed over time, influenced by ever-changing political and social conditions.

Literature about the history of childhood during the years of the War of Resistance and the Civil War is scarce, but growing. One of the most significant contributions is Colette Plum's study on the orphanages instituted by the Nationalist Government during the War of Resistance. The war created at least two million orphans in China. To ease this thorny problem, between 1938 and

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<sup>75</sup> For information about the work of John Dewey at the Teacher College of the Columbia University check: <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/coce/detail.asp?Id=About+Us&Info=A+Photographic+Exhibition>. Last access: 5 May 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Xu Zhixin, "A Critical Evaluation of John Dewey's Influence on Chinese Education," *American Journal of Education*, Vol. 103, No. 3 (May, 1995): 302-325. An account of the way in which elite schoolboys viewed the new wducational system can be found in Joh L. Saari, *Legacies of Childhood: Growing Up Chinese in a Time of Crisis, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>77</sup> Mary Ann Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China: from Lu Xun to Mao Zedong* (NY: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 1999).

1944 the Nationalist government and the China's National Relief Commission built and subsidized hundreds of children's homes all over China. The establishment of these institutions was also connected with the attempt of the Nationalist Government to discursively construct the 'war orphan' into a potent cultural symbol infused with national ideology. In children's homes, these war orphans could be educated as model future citizens, an example to the entire population.<sup>78</sup> While Plum focused on the Nationalist Government's attempt to promote orphans as model citizens, in her doctoral thesis Lily Chang examined how during the war the government tried to handle the problem of rising juvenile criminality.<sup>79</sup> During and after the war the number of petty crimes committed by children rose considerably. For this reason, a new legal framework was created in order to better discern the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. The subject of the criminalization of children is also present in Janet Chen's *Guilty of Indigence: the Urban Poor in China 1900-1953*, in which the scholar touches on the subject of the inhuman conditions in which homeless children were obliged to live in workhouses instituted in Beijing and Shanghai.<sup>80</sup>

The experience of Chinese children during the early years of the PRC is still an unexplored subject. Farquhar explained how the production of children's literature was centralized and controlled during the early years of the PRC, and how heroes of the new stories became role models for readers.<sup>81</sup> Anita Chan based her research about the effects of education on Chinese children before the Cultural Revolution on the interviews she conducted with former Red Guards.<sup>82</sup> Certainly, the subject of history of children/childhood in twentieth century China is underdeveloped and it will probably be one of the next fields of study for Chinese and Western historians. This thesis aims to contribute to the discussion on the discursive construction of childhood and its political employment in twentieth century China.

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<sup>78</sup> Colette Plum, "Orphans in the Family: Family Reform and Children's Citizenship during the Anti-Japanese War, 1937-1945" in *Beyond Suffering: Recounting War in Modern China*, ed. James A. Flath, (Vancouver, B.C.:UBC Press, 2011), 186-208.

<sup>79</sup> Lily Chang, "Contested Childhood: Law and Social Deviance in Wartime China 1937-1945," (PhD, University of Oxford, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Janet Y. Chen, *Guilty of Indigence: The Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953* (Princeton, N.J. ; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 249-283.

<sup>82</sup> Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (London: Macmillan, 1985).



## SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is mostly based on the content of Zhang Leping's *Sanmao* comic strips published in China between 1935 and 1962. In these years, Zhang Leping published several hundred comic strips in various magazines and newspapers: *Sanmao* 三毛 in 1936; *Sanmao Joins the Army* in 1946; *Sanmao's Unauthorized Biography* (*Sanmao waizhuan*, 三毛外傳) between 1946-1947, *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* between 1947-1949; *Sanmao's Denunciation* (*Sanmao de kongsu*, 三毛的控訴) and *Sanmao Stands Up* (*Sanmao fanshen ji*, 三毛翻身記) in 1951; *Sanmao's Diary* (*Sanmao riji*, 三毛日記) in 1956, *Sanmao Yesterday and Today* (*Sanmao jinxi*, 三毛今昔) 1959, and *The Days in which Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation* (*Sanmao zai yingjie jiefang de rizi li*, 三毛迎接解放的日子里) in 1962, his last *Sanmao* comic serial published before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. To analyze in the thesis all these strips would have been an impossible endeavor. While I have carefully read all the strips from the original newspapers, among hundreds of images, I selected those which best illustrate how through the portrayal of his little hero *Sanmao*, Zhang Leping popularized contemporary discourses about childhood in order to tackle broader questions about Chinese society and politics. The content of the comic strips selected does not contrast with the images not included in the dissertation, but they best embody the message (or the messages) of each comic serial.

Since visual materials are the main sources of my thesis, it is necessary to explain how I worked, showing how images – and in this case comic strips – can be used as an historical source. According to Ludmilla Jordanova's *The Look of the Past: Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice*, in dealing with visual material as historical source it is relevant to take into consideration several elements: the historical background in which the image in question was produced; the agencies active in shaping its content and style; the technical means through which it was disseminated; the targeted public and its reception.<sup>83</sup> In particular, as we have seen in the previous section, cartoons and comic strips are even more specific visual sources, since they rely on a set of rhetorical tools within a humoristic or even satirical context.

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<sup>83</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past: Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

As far as possible, I have sought to work on the original versions of Zhang Leping's strips, which I collected from contemporary newspapers and magazines that can be consulted in Shanghai Municipal Library. To work on the first edition of Zhang Leping's strips is important, since only in this way is it possible to understand the original message of the artist, which through the years was modified in multiple ways. However, since some of the magazines published in the 1930s were not available for consultation, I relied on on-line databases such as Dacheng Old Journals to find images from this period, and in the case of the wartime material, I relied on edited collections.<sup>84</sup> I was particularly interested in collecting the original strips of *Sanmao joins the Army* and *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*, since, as we will see in Chapter 5, these two serials were revisited and modified after 1949. The contemporary editions still present some small, yet significant variations with respect to the originals.

To follow the progressive transformation of Zhang Leping's work, it is necessary to clarify the time-frame in which each comic serial was published. In fact, once extracted from its original historical context, the interpretation of an image can change. As pointed out by Jordanova, periodization is important since it can provide information about the possible modes of explanation of a specific image. The relation between an image and the time of its production is complementary: while on the one hand the timeframe in which an image was produced can provide us with useful information about the correct interpretation of the artefact; on the other hand, an image can be used in order to think about a specific historical period.<sup>85</sup> The importance of periodization for the correct understanding of Zhang Leping's strips played a central role in my decision to organize this thesis in a chronological fashion.

Another important element in the analysis of visual sources is the written description of the image being taken into consideration. A detailed description is 'a bridge between the source and its interpretation', and it helps the historian to identify the most interesting features of the image and to build a common understanding of the source with the readers.<sup>86</sup> In the thesis, I provide a

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<sup>84</sup> Dacheng Old Journals Full-text database (*Dacheng laojiu qikan quanwen shjuku*, 大成老旧期刊全文數據庫) provides the full text of numerous magazines published in China between and 1883 and 1949. <http://www.dachengdata.com/>. Last access: 1 May 2014.

<sup>85</sup> Jordanova, *The Look of the Past*, 97.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

description for each image, bringing to the attention of the readers the details most relevant for my argument. Furthermore, since most of the strips taken onto consideration present humorous or satirical features, I explain in which the artist conveyed his message through specific modes of visual expression.

While the description of content of an image, its style and the identification of the historical moment in which it was produced are essential for the understanding of the artefact, the analysis would not be complete without considering the multiple agencies which influenced the production, distribution, success and understanding of each image. For this reason, it is indispensable to study not only the content of an illustration, but also the artistic and intellectual environment in which it was created, the influence of government institutions, and the ways in which it was disseminated. Therefore, to study the agencies that influenced and shaped Zhang Leping's work, besides comic strips I have analyzed other visual and textual sources.

The life and thought of Zhang Leping is one of the keys to the understanding on his work. Zhang Leping came from a humble social background; his formal education was limited to a few years of elementary school, followed by an experience as an apprentice in Shanghai and some courses in a professional school.<sup>87</sup> Although he was a skilful artist able to experiment with different genres and techniques, Zhang Leping lacked the cultural sophistication of a cartoonist like Feng Zikai, whose work, as we have seen, attracted the attention of numerous scholars. While Feng Zikai wrote several diaries and notes, Zhang Leping left few written essays about his work, and did not keep a personal diary, leaving us his drawings as one of the few means of access for an understanding of his political thought and perspective on contemporary society. Nevertheless, the artist never failed to write an introduction to each of his comic serials. The prefaces for the collection of his Sanmao strips are precious sources of information about the author's aims. They were originally published in the magazines or newspapers where the strips were also published, and then reprinted in the collected volumes of the strips. Another source of information of Zhang Leping's thought and artistic ideas were the cartoonist's contribution to debates about comic art, which were often published in specialized magazines. Finally, Zhang Leping's family, especially his son Zhang Weijun, who I had the opportunity to interview twice in Shanghai in December

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<sup>87</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 1.

2013, collected pictures, documents and the original *Sanmao* picture-story books. Most of the material collected by the family is available for consultation on the official website dedicated to Zhang Leping's little hero.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, in the Zhang Leping Memorial Hall (*Zhang Leping Jiniaguan*, 張樂平紀念館), which opened in the artist's hometown Haiyan 海鹽 in 1995, is possible to see some of the original works of the artist.

Besides Zhang Leping's own writing and the information collected by the family, also the words of people who knew the artist can be a reliable source of information. For instance, other cartoonists, but also journalists, educators and intellectuals published articles about Zhang Leping and his work between the 1930s and the 1960s. The content of *Sanmao* strips was one of the most popular topics. These articles not only provide us with data about how Zhang Leping and his work were perceived by members of the Chinese intelligentsia, they also show the cartoonist's personal connections among fellow artists and publishers. As appears from these sources, Zhang Leping maintained close contact with left-wing artists and intellectuals, whose ideas influenced his thought and work. Similarly, the political background of the publications in which Zhang Leping's cartoons appeared reveal the political and cultural background in which the artist operated. At the beginning of his career, he published his strips in several magazines; some of them specialist graphic arts publications. From the 1940s, *Sanmao*'s strips appeared mainly on major newspapers, such as *Shenbao* and *Dagongbao*. The political background of these publications and their editorial board certainly influenced Zhang Leping's production. Political institutions also played an important role in shaping the content and style of Zhang Leping's cartoons, especially after 1949. The Beijing Municipal Archive, and especially the Shanghai Municipal Archive conserve some interesting documents, such as information on how Zhang Leping's strips were received by political authorities, a handwritten speech about children's education delivered by the cartoonist in the late 1950s, and an assessment of his work by the cadres of *Liberation Daily*.

The audience for *Sanmao* strips and their reception are two other relevant elements to consider while analyzing Zhang Leping's production. Sometimes it can be difficult to identify the viewers of an artefact. However, since audiences are often implicit in the process of creation, images can

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<sup>88</sup>Sanmao Official Website: <http://www.sanmao.com.cn/> Last access: 1 May 2014.

contain information about the targeted public. Furthermore also the means of dissemination of these images can also reveal much about those who see these images.<sup>89</sup> Children were considered the main readers of Sanmao's adventures, and this is one of the reasons why children occupy an important position in the analysis of the strips. Since, an image comes under the gaze of different publics, who elaborate and understand its content in different ways. For instance, parents, university students, educators and politicians read and commented upon Zhang Leping's work. Letters directed to the author conserved in the Zhang Leping Memorial Hall provide us with information about the fans of Sanmao and their reactions to the strips.

Finally, besides *Sanmao* comic strips, in my thesis I analyze other kinds of visual material, which can be divided into two main categories: contemporary representations of children; and images of Sanmao outside the comic strips. As regards the first category, the image of the hero-child Sanmao was just one of the many representations of children published daily in magazines and newspapers. As we will see, children were also the main protagonists of novels, fairy tales and films. These representations were constructed to support specific political and social ideas, often connected with nationalism and modernization. In his strips, Zhang Leping referred to, criticized and built on the most popular representations of childhood. Therefore, a knowledge and analysis of the contemporary discourses about children and the way in which they were popularized in visual media is necessary for an understanding of Zhang Leping's changing representations of his little hero.

Another type of visual material employed in my thesis is images of Sanmao outside the comic strips. As pointed out by historian of comic strips Ian Gordon, one of the main characteristics of a cartoon hero is that his or her image can transcend the comic-strip medium, becoming a distinct personality transferable to different visual media.<sup>90</sup> In the case of Sanmao, his image was employed for promoting events not connected with art or cartoons; in addition, the little hero was played by an actor in a film, and he was transformed into a clay-puppet for an animation movie. As we will see, Sanmao became a distinct personality, whose image continues to appear in different forms and through different media even after his creator Zhang Leping passed away in

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<sup>89</sup> Jordanova, *The Look of the Past*, 156.

<sup>90</sup> Ian Gordon, "Mass Market Modernism,; Comic Strips and the Culture of Consumption", *Australian Journal of American Studies*, Vol 14, No.2 (December 2012): 46-66-

1992. To analyze how the image of Sanmao was also constructed, reinvented and popularized also outside the comic strips is an essential element for the understanding of the long-lasting success of this iconic hero.

## THESIS OVERVIEW

The thesis is divided into five chapters organized chronologically from the 1935 till 1962. Chapter 1 follows the beginning of Zhang Leping's career and the appearance of Sanmao in relation to both the emergence of the Shanghai entertainment industry and the rising importance of children in Republican China. The success of Sanmao is analyzed in the context of the rising popularity of humorous comic strips in urban China and the interest of intellectuals, educators and politicians in the development of Chinese children into future Chinese citizens. While the first chapter deals with the pre-war years, Chapter 2 comments on the politicization of Zhang Leping's production during the Second Sino-Japanese War, with a specific focus on his employment of images of children for propaganda purposes. The theme of war remains central in Chapter 3, which analyzes the content of the 1945 comic serial *Sanmao Joins the Army*, in which Zhang Leping demonstrated his views on the conflict that had just ended and on the beginning of the civil war. Transforming Sanmao, a child, into a regular soldier, Zhang Leping created a farcical description of war, which aimed to underline the negative effects which war has on the population. Chapter 4 is entirely dedicated to the content, production and reception of Zhang Leping's most famous work *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* (1947-1949). It was in this comic serial that the artist criticized the Nationalist Party by employing the celebrations of Children's Day as an occasion for highlighting growing inequality among Chinese children and the Nationalist Government's inability to handle this problem. Finally, Chapter 5 shows how after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Zhang Leping progressively lost agency over his production by collaborating with the CCP cultural authorities in order to transform Sanmao into an icon of the Revolution and a model for the future generations. The CCP selectively appropriated the image of Sanmao, which turned from being a critique of existing politics and society into one of several educational model heroes for communist children.

## CHAPTER 1: ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY AND CHILDREN LITERATURE: THE EMERGENCE OF ZHANG LEPING'S *SANMAO* COMIC STRIPS (1935- 1937)

When Zhang Leping moved to Shanghai from the village of Haiyan in 1925, he did not know that in few years he would become one of the most popular cartoonists in the country.<sup>1</sup> Brought up in a poor family, at the age of fifteen Zhang Leping went to work as an apprentice in a print shop in Shanghai; only in 1928 did he manage to enter an art school starting his education in fine arts.<sup>2</sup> Blessed with natural artistic talent – allegedly he drew his first satirical cartoon at the age of eight – at that time the young man dreamt of a better life in the city as one of the numerous employees of Shanghai's flourishing commercial press. It was in these pre-war years that Zhang Leping was formed as a professional cartoonist, becoming known to the public especially for the adventures of his cartoon hero Sanmao. Historians tend to overlook the artist's early production, since they consider 1930s *Sanmao* to be banal strips not dissimilar to other contemporary comic serials. Certainly, Zhang Leping's early images lacked the powerful political message of his later works, yet his experience in pre-war Shanghai is extremely important for the understanding of the development of his later production.

In this chapter, I analyze Zhang Leping's pre-war production in the context of the rising popularity of other comic strips, such as Ye Qianyu's Mr. Wang, showing how cartoon characters became cultural and commercial phenomena, whose images were often employed outside the comic-strip medium. Despite sharing style, content and market to other comics, Zhang Leping's *Sanmao* strips differed because of the young age of their main protagonist, which made him an attractive character for child readers. As we will see, Zhang Leping also owed the success of his cartoon hero Sanmao to the growing interest of the public in child development, fostered by the official political discourse. While on the one hand, Zhang Leping exploited the growing interest of the public in China's younger citizens; on the other, he managed to employ his child-hero in order to comment upon widespread ideas and models of childhood, offering to his readers a socio-political commentary on contemporary urban society often overlooked by scholars. The

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<sup>1</sup> Zhang original name was Sheng 昇, but it was later changed to Leping.

<sup>2</sup> Yang Guo, *Bainian Leping*, 1.

early 1930s are also relevant since it was during these years that Zhang Leping came into contact with left-wing ideas, whose impact on the young artist was reflected not only in *Sanmao* comics but also in other contemporary works.

## **A STAR IS BORN: THE EARLY STRIPS OF SANMAO AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE COMIC STRIPS**

Before starting to draw the strips to which he owed his popularity, Zhang Leping (Fig. 1) had to do several different jobs to make ends meet in the metropolis: he illustrated several commercials, picture story books and he even designed women's clothes.<sup>3</sup> After a few years of fighting to make a name for himself, in 1929 Zhang's managed to collaborate with the influential newspaper *Shanghai News* (*Shenbao*, 申報) in the realization of the masthead image of the newspaper's famous supplement *Free Talks* (*Ziyou tan*, 自由談).<sup>4</sup> This experience helped him to enter the world of the press, and from 1930 he was able to dedicate himself almost completely to the production of cartoons. In 1934, he started collaborating with the newborn cartoon magazine *Modern Sketch*, experience which gave him the opportunity to develop his skills and to work with the most influential Chinese cartoonists of the time.<sup>5</sup> The first occasion to debut his creation Sanmao arrived in 1935, when Ye Qianyu, the creator of the popular cartoon hero *Mr. Wang* fell ill, and asked Zhang Leping to substitute for him creating new comic strips. This is how on 28 July 1935 Sanmao appeared for the first time in *Morning News Pictorial* (*Tuhua Chenbao*, 圖畫晨報), soon becoming soon one of the most famous comic strip characters in Shanghai. It is estimated that in 1937 the adventures of the little hero were published by at least twenty periodicals, for a total of more than 200 strips.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Yang Guo, *Bainian Leping*, 3-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Free Talks* was the famous cultural column of *Shenbao*, published from 1911 till 1932.

<sup>5</sup> Zhang Leping, *Zhang Leping: wo de manhua shenghuo*, 4-5. For an overview of the content of *Modern Sketch* see Shen Jianzhong, *Shidai Manhua*.

<sup>6</sup> Huang Ke, Gan Zhehu and Chen Lei, *Lao Shanghai manhua tuzhi*, 158-159.





Fig. 1: A shot of young Zhang Leping in Shanghai in the early 1930s.<sup>7</sup>

How did Zhang Leping invent Sanmao? Although talented, the artist based his strips on the work of Chinese and Western artists, which inspired him in the creation of his child-hero. To understand the rise of Sanmao and his immediate popularity it is necessary to analyze how urban readers became adjusted to the comic strip medium, and why they became so popular among city dwellers. Sanmao was just one of the many cartoon heroes who appeared in the pages of newspapers and magazines: Huang Yao's *Bull Nose*, Liang Baibo's *Miss Honey* and Gao Longsheng's *Ah Dou* were all successful heroes who daily entered the houses of Shanghai's families (Fig. 2). The figure who was crucial in popularizing the medium, however, was Ye Qianyu, whose cartoon hero, Mr. Wang, was the first to gain fame among the Chinese public. As we will see, the style, content, production and distribution of *Sanmao* comic strips shared several features with Ye Qianyu's *Mr. Wang* stories. Therefore, to understand Sanmao's success, it is necessary to explain how Ye Qianyu succeeded in popularizing the comic strip medium in China.

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<sup>7</sup> From the official website of Sanmao <http://www.sanmao.com.cn/father/story/1.html>, last access 6 May 2014.



Fig 2: In 1936, cartoonist Yan Zhexi 嚴撙西 (1909-1993), published in the magazine *Shanghai Manhua* this cartoon representing the meeting of all the most famous cartoon stars of the time. On the right it is possible to see Mr. Wang, his wife and his daughter. On the right in the bottom corner Sanmao is beating Ah Dou. In the center of the picture, a confused Bull Nose looks around. Not far from him, Miss Honey appears, posing for Little Chen. Also the bottle of ink appearing in the background was the main subject of the first cover of *Modern Sketch* published on 20 January 20, 1934. *Shanghai Sketch*, Issue 6, 1936.

Ye Qianyu's *Mr. Wang* made his appearance on the Shanghai comic-stage in 1928, through the pages of the periodical *Shanghai Sketch* (*Shanghai Manhua*, 上海漫畫).<sup>8</sup> Described by his creator as a 'shambling, long faced, sharp nosed, moustached rich man from the countryside', Mr. Wang enjoyed an adventurous life in Shanghai together with his 'roly-poly wife, fashion addict daughter and his rich friend, Little Chen (Xiao Chen, 小陳)'.<sup>9</sup> Ye Qianyu's comics challenge the visual language of well-established Chinese graphic narrative – such as *lianhuanhua* – presenting stories based on Chinese comic *huaji* culture employing a kinetic visual language which recalled

<sup>8</sup> Ye Qianyu, *Ye Qianyu: wo de manhua shenghuo*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

a cinematographic way of communication. The connection between *Mr. Wang* and the *huaji* culture was underlined by Ye Qianyu himself, who in one of his autobiographies declared: 'Every week, Mr. Wang performed a farce (*huajixi*, 滑稽戲) for his readers'.<sup>10</sup> The textual techniques employed by Ye in his strips differed little from the *huaji* jokes, since Mr. Wang's stories drew on surprise, constantly turning the readers' expectation upside down. For example, the strip 'Catching the Thieves' (*Zhuo zei*, 捉賊) (Fig. 3) is a perfect example of the application of *huaji* techniques to the graphic novel. In the first panel, Mr. Wang and Little Chen are portrayed sitting in an illegal gambling den playing mahjong with many other men. Suddenly, two policemen break into the room, and our two heroes are arrested while the other gamblers flee. Mr. Wang and Little Cheng are then escorted to the police station, where suddenly the story takes a different course. The last panel shows the two policemen and the two gamblers happily playing mahjong in the police station, underlining how the policemen went to the gambling den in order to find two additional players for their mahjong game.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 2.



Fig. 3: Ye Qianyu, 'Catching Thieves' (*Zhuo zei*, 捉賊).<sup>11</sup>

Ye employed all the elements of the *huaji* traditions in drawing these strips. First, all the characters of the strips are tricksters: Mr. Wang and Little Cheng breach the law in gambling, but the policemen are also guilty of the same vice. Another feature typical of the *huaji* is the tendency to surprise the public turning their expectations upside down. The last panel showing our two cartoon heroes playing mahjong in the police station makes us laugh because it counters

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 12.

what we know is supposed to happen. Finally, these strips presented a comic description of urban reality, in which the readers are both observers and participants. Although mahjong gambling was illegal, it still remains one of the most popular forms of entertainment in China still nowadays, and then virtually everybody broke the rule, policemen included.

Ye Qianyu's employment of *huaji* techniques and themes in his comics made *Mr. Wang* familiar for the Chinese readers; however, it is evident that Ye's comics differed immensely from the visual style of contemporary *lianhuanhua*. Indeed, the visual features of *Mr. Wang* were much closer to contemporary Western comic strips than to the Chinese visual tradition. Where did Ye Qianyu draw inspiration from? Apparently, *Mr. Wang* was created following the success of an American comic strip series, called *Bringing up Father*, published in Shanghai during the 1920s by the English language newspaper *China Daily* (*Dalu bao*, 大陸報).<sup>12</sup> *Bringing up Father* – created by the American cartoonist George McManus (1884-1954) – was the story of Mr. Jiggs, an immigrant Irishman in the United States who becomes suddenly very wealthy by winning one million dollars in the lottery. All the comic strips are centered on the attempts of Jiggs, his wife Maggie and their daughter Nora to enter the nouveau rich class leaving behind their working class origins.<sup>13</sup> The parallels with *Mr. Wang*'s story are clear. *Mr. Wang* is quite wealthy landlord, but he comes from the countryside and similarly to Jiggs he doesn't know how to behave in the city. Furthermore, like Jiggs *Mr. Wang* also must maintain his demanding wife and daughter. The choice of a contemporary urban middle-class man as the main hero of a graphic novel was a significant change in the realm of Chinese visual art.

The similar characteristics of the main heroes are not the only features that connected *Mr. Wang* to *Bringing up Father*. Ye Qianyu was the first Chinese artist to employ the model of Western comic strips in his graphic novels. The employment of panel-division; the introduction of speech balloons and the dynamic description of the environment where the characters move are all features which Ye developed from the Western model. In contrast to *lianhuanhua*, in *Mr. Wang* the scenes are described in a cinematographic manner. The panels were not a decorative addition

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<sup>12</sup> Huang Ke, Gan Zhehu and Chen Lei, *Lao Shanghai manhua tuzhi*, 136.

<sup>13</sup> Keery Soper, "Performing 'Jiggs': Irish Caricature and Comedic Ambivalence toward Assimilation and the American Dream in George McManus' 'Bringing Up Father'," *Journal of The Gilded Age & Progressive Era*, Vol.4, No.2 (2005): 173-213.

to the story, but were the essential core of the narration. The different modes of communication between comics and picture-story books were relevant elements of distinction, since they reveal the development of a new visual language in urban China. In particular, the success of comic strips like *Mr. Wang* in China should be analyzed in the light of the contemporary rise of cinema as a popular form of mass entertainment.<sup>14</sup>

Mr. Wang, the first Chinese cartoon hero, introduced several relevant innovations into contemporary visual culture. Ye Qianyu's strips heavily influenced the work of Zhang Leping, who employed several techniques already developed by Ye. The adventures of Sanmao were based on German cartoonist Erich Ohser Plauen's (1903-1944) *Father and Son* (*Vater und Sohn*), a comic serial published in *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* between 1934 and 1937. E.O. Plauen's strips were introduced into China, and they were very appreciated by Chinese cartoonists.<sup>15</sup> The 157 comic strips had as main protagonists a bald father and his seven-year old son Eric, having different adventures with unpredictable outcomes. The similarities between *Sanmao* and *Father and Son* are evident: firstly, both the comic serials have a child and a father as main protagonists (and both the fathers are bald); secondly, they share similar clean black and white graphics; and finally they both rely on slapstick humour without employing words. Some of the strips even resemble each other, as in the case of figure 4 and 5, where both Eric and Sanmao unsuccessfully try to hide their misdeeds from their dads. Eric breaks a mirror while playing with a stick, and afraid of punishment, he decides to paint a portrait of his father on the wall behind the frame. The trick works only for a short while: Eric's father realizes that something is wrong when his reflection doesn't follow his movements (Fig. 4) In the case of *Sanmao*, the child is depicted while chasing a dog. In the excitement of the run, he accidentally breaks the statue of a naked child standing on a little table. Scared of the possible punishment, the naughty hero decides to undress and to take the place of the broken statue for the amusement of his public (Fig. 5). The strips also shared the minimalistic realization of space. The background is delineated only through the panel frames and a few other details that set the context of the adventure.

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1-17.

<sup>15</sup> Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 124.



Furthermore, Zhang Leping copied from Plauen the idea of using lines in order to signal his character's movements, as we can see in panel 3 of *Father and Son* strip and panel 2 of *Sanmao*.

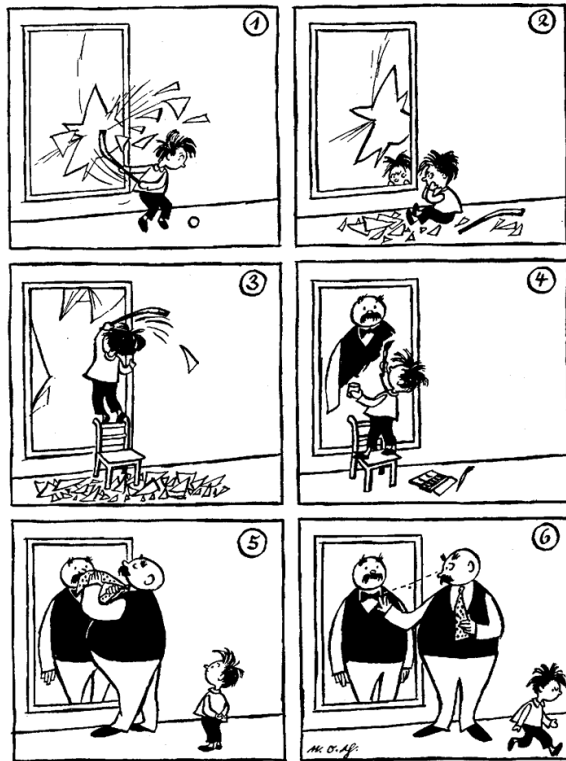


Fig. 4: E.O. Plauen. *Father and Son*.

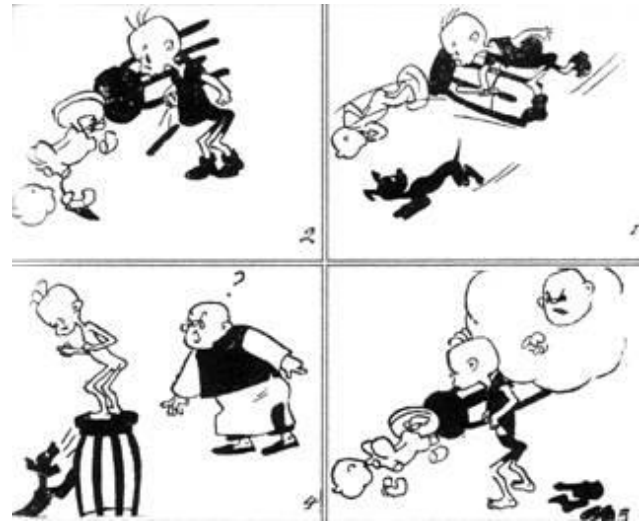


Fig. 5: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao*, *Shanghai Sketch*, Issue 4, 1936.

Although Zhang Leping clearly drew inspiration from Plauen's comic serial, his strips differed from their German predecessor in various ways, making Zhang's comic strips an original production with unique features. For instance, while in Plauen's story humour is generated by both father and son's actions; in the case of Zhang Leping's strips *Sanmao* becomes the center of the attention. While the child's father appeared regularly in 1935, his figure tended to fade in later strips, leaving *Sanmao* as the main protagonist of the humorous farce. The comic power of the cartoon hero lay partially in his bodily features, which made him an easily recognizable character among others. Although the style, contents and aims of *Sanmao* strips changed drastically over the years, on his first appearance in the press the little hero already possessed all those iconic attributes that never left him during his career. The child's skinny body buttressed a

big round head, at the top of which three long unruly locks stuck out.<sup>16</sup> Thin neck, protruding ears and button nose completed his disproportionate, yet funny, figure. These features never really changed till 1949.<sup>17</sup>

Besides his physical characteristics, the personality of Zhang's hero was an essential component of its comic power. In an article about Chinese comic characters published in *Shanghai Sketch* in May 1936, Wang Zimei 汪子美 (1913-2002) – a cartoonist trained in Sichuan Province who met Zhang Leping, Ye Qianyu and Ding Cong when he started working in Shanghai in 1933 – claimed that Sanmao was 'cunning as Mr. Wang, naughty as Little Cheng and stubborn like Ah Dou'.<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, being Sanmao part of the 'farce spectacle' typical of the *huaji* culture, Sanmao shared many traits with his predecessor Mr. Wang. Not only could his figure and personality bring a smile to the face of readers, but also his strips followed the rules of farce. For example, in the strip entitled 'Blind Imitation' (*Mofang*, 模仿) (Fig. 6), Sanmao furtively peeks into an art studio, where a painter is portraying a nude model. In the third panel, the child attracts the attention of a little girl standing not far from him. This action surprises the readers, who cannot understand the connection between what Sanmao saw in the artist's studio and the little girl. The last panel reveals Sanmao's intention: the girl becomes the child's 'nude model', and she does so exposing her backside to the 'artist'.

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<sup>16</sup> 'Sanmao' is a common nickname for children, especially in the Yangtze area. The nickname most probably originated from the traditional haircut of Chinese children, who are bald with just a lock of hair on the top of their forehead.

<sup>17</sup> After 1949 the image of Sanmao was restyled. His body became more proportional, more realistic. Nevertheless, his characteristic three hairs, big nose and his funny locks made the little hero always recognizable.

<sup>18</sup> Wang Zimei, "Wu zhong lianhuan manhua" 五種连环漫畫 [Five types of comic strips], *Shanghai Manhua* 上海漫畫, Issue 2, May 1936.



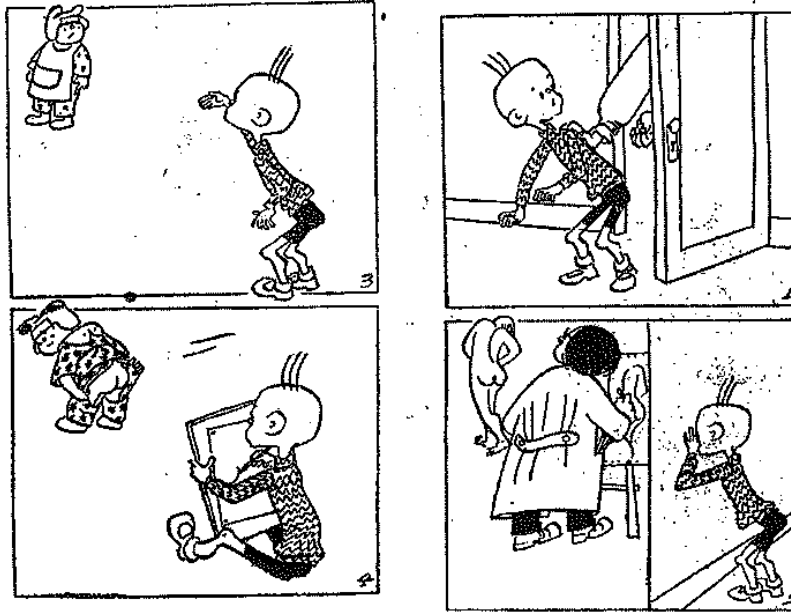


Fig. 6: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao*. 'Blind Imitation' (*Mofang*, 模仿), 1935.<sup>19</sup>

In this case, Sanmao's young age is essential to the humouristic intent of the strip, which is funny since the readers realize that the children misinterpret what they are watching. The young age of the main character allowed Zhang Leping to approach contemporary reality from a new perspective. Sanmao's age was a novelty which changed slightly the world of Chinese comics. He looks at the adult world with a child's eyes, and he tries to make sense of it with hilarious outcomes. In the article already quoted above, cartoonist Wang Zimei pointed out Sanmao's specific quality claiming that '[...] since Sanmao is a child, he is way more objective than them [Mr. Wang, Little Chen and Ah Dou]. Thanks to his innocence, he can satirize the disappointing conditions of our society.'<sup>20</sup>

Another unique quality of Zhang Leping's strips was the absence of speech balloons. The speech balloon is considered a fundamental feature of comic strips by several art historians. For instance, in his article about the aesthetic of comic strips, Robert C. Harvey underlined how the combination of words and pictures was a fundamental element of comic strips, since 'neither words nor pictures are quite satisfactory alone without the other'.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, this statement was

<sup>19</sup> Zhang Leping, *Zhang Leping: wo de manhua shenghuo*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Wang Zimei, "Wu zhong lianhuan manhua" *Shanghai Manhua* 上海漫畫, Issue 2, May 1936.

<sup>21</sup> Robert C. Harvey, "The Aesthetic of the Comic Strip," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol.4, No. 12 (1979): 641.

based on the case of American and European comic strips, which mostly include speech balloons in their frame. Ye Qianyu added lengthy dialogues in his strips, as for instance in 'Dispute on Family Property' (*Jiachan jiufen*, 家產糾紛), where the understanding of the strip relies mostly on the content of the dialogues (Fig. 7).

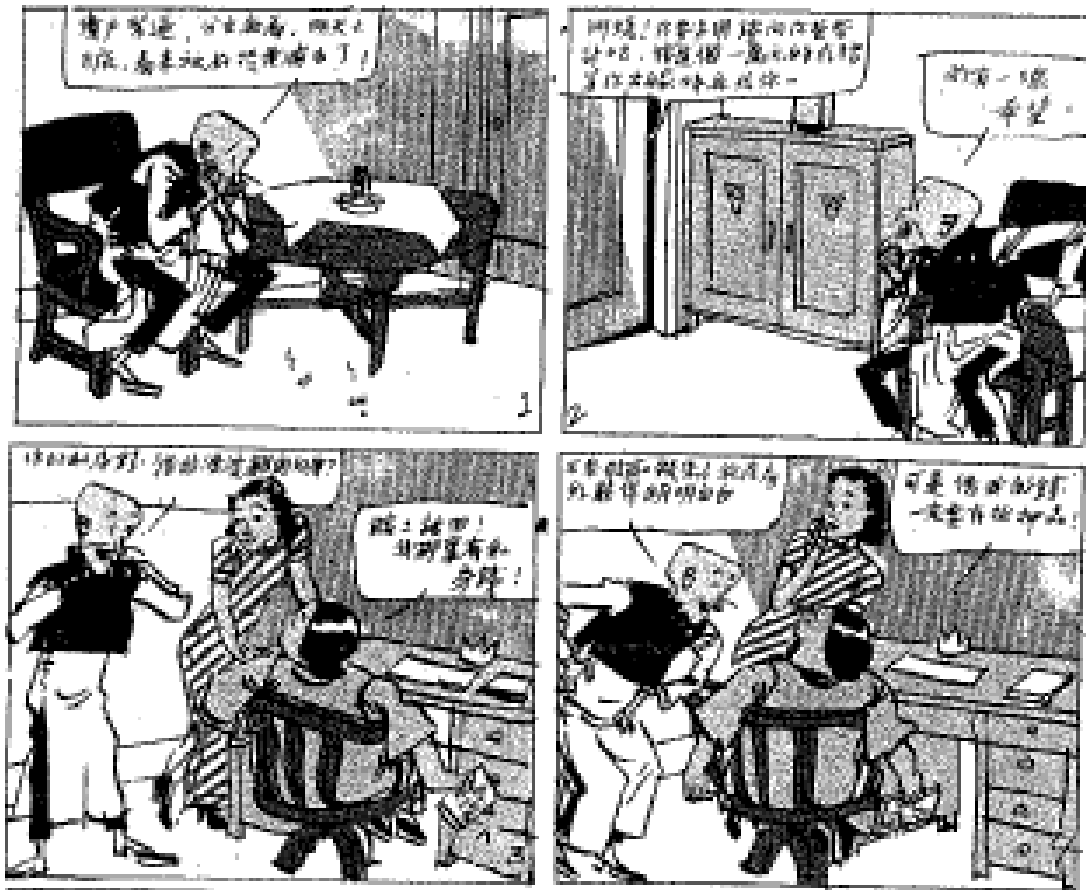


Fig. 7: Ye Qianyu. *Dispute on Family Property* (*Jiachan jiufen*, 家產糾紛).<sup>22</sup>

In the wake of the success of *Mr. Wang*, most famous Chinese famous comics, such as *Miss Honey* and *Ah Dou*, contained speech balloons. In contrast, inspired by Plauen's *Father and Son*, Zhang Leping also based his strips on slapstick humour instead of dialogues. In the preface written for the opening of the 'Sanmao Exhibition' in 1949, the artist recalled the central role which dialogues played in Chinese comic strips in the 1920s and early 1930s:

<sup>22</sup> Ye Qianyu, *Ye Qianyu: wo de manhua shenghuo*, 11.

I started to draw the adventures of Sanmao fifteen years ago, when Chinese cartoonists did not seem interested in drawing cartoons without dialogues, and even readers had not developed the taste for cartoons without dialogues yet. It seemed that cartoonists needed to add characters especially in serialized comics, since the readers were used to understanding cartoons only through the medium of the written language. (...) When I started drawing Sanmao, I took a risky decision! I thought that only by reducing as much as possible the help of characters in the strips would I allow readers to understand all they could understand just from the lines of my drawings.<sup>23</sup>

Zhang Leping's statement provides us with useful information. First of all, it proves that the absence of dialogues in the strips distinguished *Sanmao* from other contemporary Chinese strips. Secondly, the artist's words are particularly relevant when we think about the intended public of these stories. Historians of Chinese graphic arts have underlined on several occasions how the absence of words in *manhua* and *lianhuanhua* was a fundamental factor for the popularization and subsequent politicization of these visual forms.<sup>24</sup> As appears from Zhang Leping's statement, readers of comic strips like *Mr. Wang* and *Sanmao* could not only read, but could understand the rather complex messages proposed by the images. I will discuss later the issue of the intended public of the comic strips; for now from Zhang Leping's words it is possible to assume that the absence of dialogue in *Sanmao* was a deliberate innovation, which also helped the commercialization of this specific graphic product.

## **BEYOND THE COMIC STRIP MEDIUM: THE COMMERCIAL DIMENSION OF THE CARTOON HERO**

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Mr. Wang, Sanmao and many other cartoon heroes became ubiquitous on the pages of the major newspapers, magazines and reviews. Chinese cultural entrepreneurs realized the commercial potential of comic strips, launching this graphic medium as a mass market product. Some of the magazines publishing cartoons and strips were specialized in graphic arts; some others – for example newspapers – published comic strips just

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<sup>23</sup> Zhang Leping, "Wo zenme hua Sanmao" 我怎么画三毛 [How I Draw San Mao], *Dagong bao*, 4 April, 1949.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 94-151.

in order to attract new readers. Even more noteworthy was the employment of cartoon heroes outside the comic strip medium: in the 1930s Mr. Wang, Sanmao and other cartoon characters appeared through different visual genres, generating a remunerative market and becoming recognizable icons of Chinese popular visual culture.

According to the historian of American comics Ian Gordon, the commercial success of comics derives from the marketable nature of the cartoon hero, who can transcend the comic strips becoming a distinct personality transferable to different visual media.<sup>25</sup> This tendency was already well developed in the United States, where at the beginning of the twentieth century cartoon heroes such as Richard F. Outcault's *Buster Brown* and Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie* become recognizable visual icons of contemporary commercial culture. The case of *Little Orphan Annie* is particularly significant, since the image of the young girl was sold to the public through virtually every medium available at the time. *Little Orphan Annie* appeared for the first time on the pages of the New York based *Daily News* in 1924. The comic became popular to such an extent that few years later *Little Orphan Annie* appeared in at least 135 daily and 100 Sunday publications across the United States. Additionally, Gray's strips were collected in several comic books; the little orphan had a radio show dedicated to her and two movies staging her adventures were released in 1932 and 1938.<sup>26</sup>

The rise of the cartoon heroes as significant characters in the entertainment industry seemed to follow a global pattern, which was successful also in China, where characters like Mr. Wang and Sanmao had a life outside the medium of comic strips. Ye Qianyu's Mr. Wang was the first comic character to pursue a career outside comic strips. For instance, the adventures of the funny hero first released in periodicals were then collected in comic books – or *manhua lianhuanhua* – and then sold in book stores and kiosks (Fig. 8 and 9). Between 1934 and 1937, at least eight collections of Ye Qianyu's comic strips appeared on the market, published mostly by the *Shanghai Review Company* (*Shanghai zazhi gongsi*, 上海雜誌公司).<sup>27</sup> Comic books were just

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<sup>25</sup> Ian Gordon, "Mass Market Modernism," 57-59.

<sup>26</sup> Stella Riss, "Bridging the Generation Gap: Little Orphan Annie in the Great Depression," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol.43, No.4, (2010).

<sup>27</sup> Huang Ke, Gan Zhehu and Chen Lei, *Lao Shanghai manhua*, 139-140.

the first step in *Mr. Wang's* career as a 'cultural franchise in fiction and films'<sup>28</sup>, since Ye Qianyu's mischievous hero also inspired a novel and at least eleven action movies released by different cinematographic companies.<sup>29</sup>

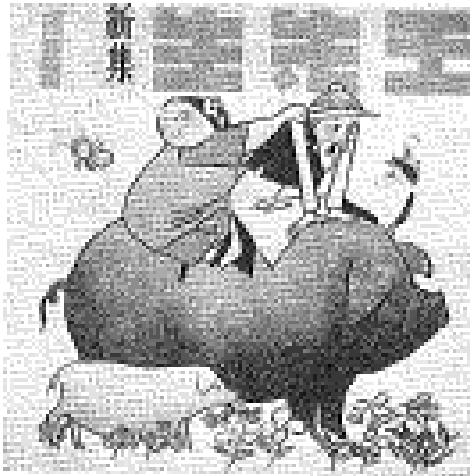


Fig. 8: *Mr. Wang Collection 1* (Wang xiansheng xinji 1, 王先生新集 1), 1936.



Fig. 9: *Mr. Wang Goes to the Countryside* (Wang xiansheng dao nongcun qu, 王先生到農村去), 1937.

*Mr. Wang* movies were particularly successful. The main producer was Mingxing Film Company (Mingxing yingpian gongsi, 明星影片公司), which opened a subsidiary company called New Age Film & Co. (Xinshidai zhipian gongsi 新時代製片公司) in order to produce *Mr. Wang* movies. Not only was Ye Qianyu was one of the shareholders of the company, but he was also the official writer of all the scenarios. The actor Tang Jie 湯傑 interpreted the silver screen Mr. Wang, becoming an alter ego of the canny Shanghaiese (Fig. 10).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Rea, "A History of Laughter," 223.

<sup>29</sup> Huang Ke, Gan Zhehu and Chen Lei, *Lao Shanghai manhua*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> Rea, "A History of Laughter," 223-224.



Fig. 10 Actor Tang Jie as Mr. Wang on the cover page of the woman magazine *Nüshen* 女神 [Goddess], Issue 1, 1935.

While *Mr. Wang* was the first Chinese comic character to branch out into novels and movies, *Sanmao* also encountered a similar destiny a few years later. One year after the first appearance of the little hero in *Morning News Pictorial*, Shanghai Magazine Company, published the first collection of *Sanmao* comic strips (Fig. 11).<sup>31</sup> The prominent intellectual Lu Jiye 盧冀埜 (1905-1951) wrote the introduction of the comic book praising Zhang Leping for his original work.<sup>32</sup> Two other collections were published before the outbreak of the War against Japan, all of them printed by the same publishing house.

<sup>31</sup> Huang Ke, Gan Zhehu and Chen Lei, *Lao Shanghai manhua*, 308.

<sup>32</sup> Yang Guo, *Bainian Leping*, 21.



Fig. 11: The first collection of *Sanmao* strips, published by Shanghai Review Company (*Shanghai zazhi gongsi* 上海雜誌公司), March 1936.<sup>33</sup>

Cartoon heroes seemed to be a reasonable source of income for cartoonists and publishing houses. Unfortunately, sources about the revenues from selling comic books during the 1930s are scarce, but some data are available. For instance, in his article about cartoons in Shanghai before the War, journalist Jack Chen noted that "They [cartoonists] received from less than a few cents to a dollar and a half for a cartoon! Full-page drawings in color sell for three to five dollars. A young artist tells me that in order to make a reasonable living he has to print fifty or more drawings a month."<sup>34</sup> From these words, it appears the work of the cartoonist was not well paid. In the same article, Chen explained how artists used to spend most of their time placing their drawings instead of producing more cartoons. In contrast, publishing houses and cinematographic companies commissioned works from artist like Ye Qianyu. For instance, according to Rea, Tianyi Film Company offered Ye Qianyu 500 yuan for each screenplay of the *Mr. Wang* movies.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, for a cartoonist the creation of a popular cartoon character was the source of a stable income and perhaps additional profits.

<sup>33</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 1

<sup>34</sup> Jack Chen, "China Militant Cartoons", *ASIA Magazine*, May 1938.

<sup>35</sup> Rea, "A History of Laughter," 224.

As any other commercial product, the success of comic strips like *Mr. Wang* and *Sanmao* relied strongly on advertising. All the merchandise connected to the cartoon heroes was systematically promoted through a sophisticated advertising structure. In the 1930s, the comic books of *Mr. Wang* were heavily advertised in several magazines. For example, in 1934 the comic books of *Mr. Wang* were promoted in the cartoon magazine *Modern Sketch* <sup>36</sup> as 'The best reading of the year for your children' (Fig. 12). This commercial was carefully designed in order to attract the attention of the public: Mr. Wang and his faithful friend Little Chen <sup>37</sup> were portrayed at the top of the page staring at a beautiful girl. The title of the comic book – simply '*Mr. Wang*' – appears in clear characters between the three figures, occupying the most important position in the advertisement. Still, the eyes of the reader are first attracted by the witty portrayal of the famous cartoon heroes and then by the name of the comic book, underlining the important role of visual elements in the advertising.

The lower section of the advertisement was more descriptive. The slogan 'The best reading of the year for your children' was written in large characters, followed by detailed instructions about how to read the comics: 'In the family, brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, uncles and aunts gather together under the same roof to read each other a volume of *Mr. Wang*, making everybody laugh'. The *Mr. Wang* comic book was therefore advertised as a product for the family, but not solely. The advertisement explained how the humorous adventures of Mr. Wang could be read with friends, and they could even help to increase 'friendship' between young boys and girls. Therefore, although *Mr. Wang* comic books were advertised mainly for children, the intended public was clearly wider. The message also gave the prices of the three volumes (eight dimes of a silver dollar), and the name of the publishing house Modern Books Corporation (*Shidai tushu gongsi*, 時代圖書公司).

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<sup>36</sup> This advertisement was published in the first issue of *Modern Sketch* in 1934. From Shanghai Municipal Archive. D2-0-2748-1. "Wang Xiansheng" 王先生 [Mr. Wang], 1936.

<sup>37</sup> Ye Qianyu created another serial of comic serial called "Little Chen goes to Nanjing". In which he described the life of Little Chen as a government clerk in the Nationalist capital.



D2-0-2748-1

繪畫 先生 葉 凌 子  
繪畫 先生 葉 凌 子

10月5日

王先生

兒童年之  
絕好讀物

家庭之間兄弟姊妹父母伯  
叔圍聚一堂如執「王先生」  
一冊互相傳觀必能歡笑  
書室之內開卷讀書至精神  
疲乏之時閱「王先生」一  
冊能引君大笑精神一振  
朋友相聚以「王先生」一  
冊各為話柄必能聯絡感情  
增高友誼兒女咸慕閱「王  
先生」圖意顯明可培植天  
倫樂趣

已出第一  
第二  
第三  
集

定價每集大洋八角  
郵購寄費 國內一成  
國外二成

時化圖書公司

上海福州路九十五號 電話二九〇一三

Fig. 12: Commercial for Mr. Wang comic books. *Modern Sketch*, 1936.

This advertisement was a well-thought-off attempt to attract the attention of a heterogeneous public: children, their families and young people. Furthermore, the images of Mr. Wang and Little Chen wearing western-style suites while staring at a young fashionable lady were mostly directed to the urban public of Shanghai. The professional style of the advertisements for *Mr. Wang* is unsurprising, since almost all the most popular Chinese cartoonists started their career working in advertising companies. For instance, in the early 1920s Ye Qianyu worked at the Shanghai Three Associations Company (*Shanghai sanyou shiyeshe*, 上海三友實業社), which employed also Zhang Leping. Later, Sanmao's creator moved to the Weiluo Advertising (*Weiluo guanggao gongsi* 維羅廣告公司).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Huang Ke, Gan Zhehu and Chen Lei, *Lao Shanghai manhua*, 93.

*Sanmao* was also advertised in the major newspapers and magazines thanks to marketing methods not dissimilar from those used for *Mr. Wang*. For example, the advertisement for the first volume of *Sanmao* published in the magazine *Survey of Books and Newspapers* (*Shubao zhanwang*, 書報展望) relied on the same structure as *Mr. Wang*'s commercial (Fig. 13). The name of *Sanmao* and the image of the little boy appeared at the top of the page attracting the attention of the viewers. A brief presentation of the main protagonist was visible in the lower section of the commercial, which promoted *Sanmao* comics as a great reading material for children. From this advertisement we can also infer another interesting feature of the system of promotion of comic strip heroes: a new character was often promoted through the image of another already successful cartoon hero, in this case *Mr. Wang*. For instance, this advertisement reminded readers that the Shanghai Magazine Company – the publishing house producing *Sanmao* comic books – had already issued a volume of *Mr. Wang* and the company was ready to publish another volume dedicated to another cartoon hero. This kind of advertising had two functions: on one hand, comparing *Sanmao* with *Mr. Wang* the publishing house could attract the attention of the readers who knew Ye Qianyu's work but not Zhang Leping's hero. On the other hand, to present *Sanmao* as one of the volumes of a larger collection was a clear attempt to persuade the readers to purchase the full series of books.



Fig. 13: Commercial for the first volume of *Sanmao*, from *Survey of Books and Newspapers* (*Shubao zhanwang*, 書報展望).<sup>39</sup>

In this case, the images of two cartoon heroes were employed in order to advertise each other as part of the same commercial action; however, often the recognizable features of these characters were employed in order to promote other publications or products. I will introduce two examples. In 1936 Zhang Leping published *Little Orphan Girl* (*Xiao gunü*, 小孤女), a *lianhuanhua* based on the script of the eponymous movie.<sup>40</sup> To promote his work, Zhang Leping employed the image of his more famous character Sanmao, a well-known face which could

<sup>39</sup> Yang Guo, *Baishi Leping*, 20

<sup>40</sup> The content of this movie/*lianhuanhua* will be discussed in the next pages.

facilitate the sales of his new work (Fig. 14). It is relevant to note that the name of the author, Zhang Leping, was not enough in order to attract the public: Sanmao seemed to be more famous than his own creator.



Fig. 14: Commercial for Zhang Leping's *lianhuanhua Xiao gunü* 小孤女 [Little Orphan Girl], 1936. Sanmao introduces to the public the orphan Chen Jiejie 陳姐姐, the new creation of his own maker.<sup>41</sup>

Children's products were often advertised in comic books. The alliance between cartoon heroes and children's products in advertising was a winner, since comic strips were considered ideal reading for younger people. This is why children were also targeted as readers in the advertisements for *Mr. Wang* and *Sanmao* analyzed above. The commercial connection between comic books and children was evident also in the choice of release dates for these comic books.<sup>42</sup> As we have seen in the advertisement for *Mr. Wang*, comics were also presented as excellent presents for children. In order to exploit this idea even better, publishing houses often decided to release their books on the occasion of New Year or other events which required an exchange of presents. For instance, often the comics were released on purpose on 4 April, on the occasion of National Children's Day, or on 10 October, the Anniversary of the Republic of China. These dates were also politically significant, since they followed the Nationalist Government's

<sup>41</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> National Children Day was celebrated in China on 4 April. In December 1949, the new Communist government decided to celebrate children on June 1, calling the event International Children Day (*Guoji ertong jie* 國際兒童節).

endorsement of the consumption of national products.<sup>43</sup> As we have seen, the image of Sanmao could be employed also outside the comic strip medium, generating in this case other sources of income for the publishing house and the artist. However, this specific characteristic was employed later on by cartoonists like Zhang Leping also for political purposes too.

## SANMAO AND CONTEMPORARY CHINESE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

If on one side Sanmao is simple reading for children, on the other it nevertheless provides a good lesson for them. Normally illustrated children books (*ertong tuhua duwu*, 兒童圖畫讀物) show to children the same candies, cookies, flowers and little birdies that we can find in fairy tales (*tonghua*, 童話). These children books mould the temperament of our children in the wrong way. Conversely, Sanmao stimulates children with challenging, uncomfortable and reasonable questions, and this is a great result.<sup>44</sup>

With these words, in 1936 cartoonist Wang Zimei praised Zhang Leping's strips for being an exemplary work of children's literature. Certainly, the commercials promoting Sanmao comic books also presented them as perfect presents for children. But, what exactly made Zhang Leping's strips children's literature? How do we position Sanmao in the contemporary production of children literature? To understand Wang Zimei's comment about *Sanmao*, it would be useful to understand the growing importance of children in the contemporary political discourse in Republican China. The emergence of *Sanmao* should be analyzed in the light of the new position which children held in the intellectual and political life of Republican China. To understand why an imaginary child like Sanmao became so influential, it would be useful to analyze briefly the historical background which led to the development of a renewed interest in children as political figures and consumer recipients.

After the collapse of the Qing Empire and the establishment of the Republic, May Fourth Intellectuals identified children as the key for the success of China as a modern country. In his

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<sup>43</sup> Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 323-324.

<sup>44</sup> Wang Zimei, "Wu zhong lianhuan manhua", *Shanghai Sketch*, Issue 2, May 1936.

work about the evolutionary thinking in Chinese book culture in the first half of the twentieth century, Andrew Jones pointed out how 'the child' became a central figure for the intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement, for whom the new generations represented their expectations for the future development of a new China.<sup>45</sup> Following Lu Xun's celebrated slogan 'Save the children!'<sup>46</sup>, several intellectuals connected with the May Fourth Movement tried to end the reproduction of Confucian culture among the new generations, employing new strategies for the development of children's education, literature and family environment.<sup>47</sup> The discourse of reformist intellectuals about the role of children in strengthening of the Chinese nation resulted in the production of literature, goods and educational toys designed to help children to develop into Chinese citizens. The emergence and popularity of a cartoon hero like Sanmao was clearly influenced by the contemporary commercial and political interest for the figure of 'the child'. Still, how should we interpret Zhang Leping's humorous strips in the context of Chinese children's literature?

During the 1920s and 1930s, May Fourth Intellectuals debated the function of children's literature. In the early 1920s, Lu Xun – considered the main theoretician of modern Chinese children's literature – supported the European view of children's innocence. In this context, Lu Xun promoted fairy tales as literary models for children's literature. Bing Xin's 冰心 (1900-1999) collection of short stories *Letters to Young Readers* (*Ji xiaoduzhe*, 寄小讀者) reflected this romantic vision of childhood as a golden age.<sup>48</sup> However, in the late 1920s, Lu Xun moved towards more radicalized ideas, calling for strong social commitment in children's literature, emphasizing the necessity to educate the masses about the social chasm dividing the wealthy and the poor.<sup>49</sup> Historians interpreted Lu Xun's radicalization as connected with the Nationalist Party's purge of Communists in Shanghai in 1927.<sup>50</sup> While at the early stage of the May Fourth Movement Lu Xun was aligned with a left-wing politics only partially influenced by Marxist

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<sup>45</sup> The concept of Evolution and Social Darwinism spread in China at the end of the nineteenth century through the translation by the famous scholar Yan Fu 严复 (1854-1921) of Thomas Huxley's (1825-1895) work *Evolution and Ethics*. For more information about this subject, see Andrew F. Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*, 1-27.

<sup>46</sup> Lu Xun, *Kuangren riji* 狂人日記, 1918.

<sup>47</sup> Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>48</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 115.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 72. See also Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution*, 149-151.

though, by the 1930s his political view had clearly become Marxist. His vision for a new Chinese children's literature also followed the radicalization of his political thought. In the years before his death in 1936, he translated mostly Soviet writers' stories, such as Leonid Ivanovich Panteleev's *The Watch*, the tragic story of an orphan in Russia.<sup>51</sup> In these years, Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), the Russian writer, was celebrated as the founder of Socialist Realism, and also the father of Soviet children's literature. Gorky wrote several stories for children, and he also developed theories on the use of Socialist Realism in children's literature.<sup>52</sup> Lu Xun's call for a children's literature paying more attention to social issues and realistic subjects was welcomed by several writers, including Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶 (1894-1988), who managed to integrate social issues in the fairytale structure, for example in *A Stone Figure of an Ancient Hero* (*Gudai yingxiong de shixiang* 古代英雄的石像).<sup>53</sup> Children's literature containing strong social commitment and aligned with left-wing politics was renamed 'revolutionary' by Farquhar. These kinds of stories were clearly influenced by Marxist ideology, but were not for this strictly associated with the Communist Party.<sup>54</sup>

Despite its historical significance, revolutionary children's literature was not the most widespread form of reading material for children in the 1930s. Confucian classics, vernacular novels coming from the Chinese popular tradition,<sup>55</sup> translations of Western fairy tales, educational books and specialized magazines were massively read in Shanghai. Other common reading materials for children were picture story books, or *lianhuanhua*, which could be bought or loaned for a small amount of money by their young readers. The content of picture story books was quite heterogeneous: they could be based on traditional novels (such as *Illustrated History of Three Kingdoms*); on martial arts; contemporary movies; and in the late 1920s comic strips, like *Mr. Wang*.<sup>56</sup> *Lianhuanhua* were not read only by children, in fact also teenagers and adults were

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<sup>51</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 75.

<sup>52</sup> Ron Walter, "Gorky and Soviet Children's Literature," *Children's Literature*, Vol. 6 (1977):182-187. On the influence of Gorky on children's literature and as Pioneer patron see: Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia 1890-1991* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 56,100.

<sup>53</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 105.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-145.

<sup>55</sup> Chang-Tai Hung, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, Mass. Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1985), 107-126.

<sup>56</sup> Yi Ke, Wei Ming and Wang Jun, *Xiaorensu de lishi*, 15.

regular readers, especially among the lower classes.<sup>57</sup> Despite their heterogeneous content, *lianhuanhua* were considered by literary critics and intellectuals as low-quality items, which could not be considered either as art works or educative material for children.<sup>58</sup> Once again, Lu Xun was one of the first thinkers to understand the potentiality of *lianhuanhua*, which in his opinion not only could be considered as art works, but could also be useful for education of the masses.<sup>59</sup> Eventually, in the 1930s, picture story books attracted the attention of the League of Left-Wing Writers (*Zhongguo zuoyi zuojia lianmen*, 中國左翼作家聯盟), whose members recognized in *lianhuanhua* the perfect form for revolutionary propaganda.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the content of the most popular picture story books – supernatural events, love stories, epic tales – was not considered educational by the writers.

The May Fourth Movement's call for the development of a modern Chinese society also caused a new interest in the figure of the child from an ideological, educational and even commercial perspective.<sup>61</sup> Intellectual discourse on the role of children in the strengthening of the Chinese nation became an essential element of the political culture of the Republic, and of the Nationalist Party in particular. For instance, the education of children as citizens started at school, where they were introduced to the symbols of republican modernity.<sup>62</sup> Besides education, discussion about the correct physical growth of China's younger citizens also became prevalent among Chinese politicians. Fascinated by social Darwinism and modern medical techniques, politicians promoted new parenting methods, hoping to raise a healthy younger generation able to guarantee the survival of the nation. The health and correct development of the newborn was not just a family matter, on the contrary, the importance of children's physical and intellectual development was directly connected with the growing nationalistic feelings growing and the importance to forming new citizens able to compete with the rest of the world. The central role of children in

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<sup>57</sup> As indicated by the saying 'If you read the *Tianbaotu* (one of the most popular *lianhuanhua*), you won't feel hungry.' Kuiyi Shen, "*Lianhuahua* and *Manhua* - Picture Books and Comics in Old Shanghai" in *Illustrating Asia: Comics, Humour Magazines and Pictures Book*, John A. Lent ed. (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2001): 103.

<sup>58</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 196-197.

<sup>59</sup> Lu Xun, *Lianhuatuhua bianhu* 連環圖畫辯護 [A Defense of Comics](Shanghai: Wenlin Shuju, 1936). In Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 194.

<sup>60</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 197.

<sup>61</sup> Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*, 126-147.

<sup>62</sup> Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61-62.



the nation-building discourse was exemplified in the personification of the Chinese Republic as a sickly child in need of care and education.<sup>63</sup>

This new interest for children's development boosted the production of a new literature, goods and educational toys for children, which in turn fostered the growth a commercial reality evolving around the new needs of the young consumers.<sup>64</sup> Children soon became one of the favorite targets of Chinese and foreign companies. Advertisements for medicines, food and clothes for children became almost omnipresent in newspapers and on billboards. For instance, in his research on the construction of a modern identity in Republican Shanghai, Leo Ou-fang Lee has pointed out that in the interwar period the main publishing houses in Shanghai – such as the Commercial Press (*Shangwu yinshu guan*, 商務印書館) China Bookstore Company (*Zhonghua shuju chubashe*, 中華書局出版社) – built their business principally on primers, textbooks and children's literature.<sup>65</sup> In addition to children's literature and text books, the editorial world was flooded also with magazines and reviews entirely dedicated to young readers: *Children's World* (*Ertong Shijie*, 兒童世界), *Children's Pictorial*, (*Ertong Huabao*, 兒童畫報) *Little Friend* (*Xiao Pengyou*, 小朋友), *Modern Child* (*Xiandai Ertong*, 現代兒童), *Children Magazine* (*Ertong Zazhi*, 兒童雜誌), *Early Youth Pictorial* (*Xiaonian Huabao*, 少年畫報) were just few of the various specialized magazines published in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>66</sup>

Besides books, toys came to occupy an important position among the commercial products considered essential for the correct development of children. Following the idea of progressive education, toys turned into important implements shaping the bodies and minds of their young owners. In her article about the role of toys in the nationalist discourse in Republican China, Susan R. Fernsebner points out that children's playthings were at the center of the educational,

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<sup>63</sup> Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen*, 112-113.

<sup>64</sup> Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*, 126-147. See also Susan R. Fernsebner, "A People's Playthings: Toys, Childhood, and Chinese Identity, 1909-1933," *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 6, No.3 (2010): 269-293.

<sup>65</sup> Leo Ou-fang Lee. "The Cultural Construction of Modernity in Urban Shanghai: Some Preliminary Explorations," in *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*, ed. Yeh Wen-Hsin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 31-60.

<sup>66</sup> For a complete history of Children periodicals in China see: Jian Ping, *Shanghai Shaonian Ertong Baokan Jianshi*.

nationalist and economic concern of contemporary intellectuals and politicians, to the point that a movie was even produced about the production of toys in China.<sup>67</sup>

Zhang Leping's *Sanmao* can be considered both in the context of the May Fourth intellectual reform of Chinese children's literature and as a product of the growing commercial value of children as consumers. In the quote put forward at the beginning of this section, cartoonist Wang Zimei praised Zhang Leping's comics as a model of children's literature, since they stood out from those fairy tales full of candies, cookies, flowers and little birdies, still very popular among children in the 1930s. In particular, Wang Zimei criticized the 'illustrated reading material for children', a category that contained many different kinds of reading material, from *lianhuanhua* to illustrated stories. In a few words, the cartoonist managed highlight different issues. First of all, his allusion to fairy tales referred to the heated on-going discussion between left-wing intellectuals about the employment of fairy tales in children's education. Secondly, referring to 'illustrated reading material for children' as inadequate for a young public, Wang Zimei seemed to criticize traditional *lianhuanhua*, although fairy tales were also accompanied by illustrations representing selected scenes from the story. Wang Zimei's criticism could also be directed against Disney comics, which entered the Shanghai press in those years. For instance, *Famous Funnies* (*Huaji Huabao*, 滑稽畫報), a magazine specializing in humorous comic strips- between 1936 and 1937 published *Mickey Mouse's Animal World* (*Qinshouguo Milaoshu*, 禽兽國米老), where animals were the unquestioned protagonists.<sup>68</sup> Clearly, *Sanmao* represented for the cartoonist a valid alternative for magic-based fairy tales, old-style *lianhuanhua* and Western comic books.

Underlining the way in which Zhang Leping involved children the social life of adults and the educative potential of comics for children, Wang Zimei highlighted all the elements of *Sanmao* which matched the ideals stated by the supporters of revolutionary children's literature. From this perspective, the emergence of *Sanmao* was a turning point for Chinese children's literature, since Zhang Leping's comic strips were able to merge the popularity of *lianhuanhua* with socially

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<sup>67</sup> Fernsebner, "A People's Playthings," 269-283.

<sup>68</sup> Zhou Licheng 週利成, *Shanghai lao huabao* 上海老畫報 [Old Pictorials in Shanghai] (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2011).

involved content. In her book about Chinese children's literature, Farquhar stated that in the early versions of *Sanmao* 'the emphasis is on humour and entertainment, not social exposure or ideological persuasion'.<sup>69</sup> Humour and farce were actually the most important features of *Sanmao*, which seemed to be rather a commercial comic than a serious work of revolutionary children literature. Still, there were revolutionary ideas in Zhang Leping's strips: firstly, the representation of childhood in *Sanmao* strips differed from the one proposed in contemporary media. Secondly, Wang Zimei connected *Sanmao* with other politically engaged works about children produced by Zhang Leping, which really reflected the leftist soul of the artist. In the next pages, I will point out how – despite their humoristic style – the early strips of *Sanmao* did actually contain certain characteristics which could be related to revolutionary children's literature.

## **THE CHALLENGING VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF CHILDHOOD IN SANMAO COMIC STRIPS**

The growing political and economic interests in the figure of the child, plus the increasing importance of visual culture due to the introduction of new printing techniques, resulted in an increase in production of images of children in twentieth century China. Photos, cartoons and advertisements depicting children were widespread, and they provide us with precious information about adults' expectations and ideas about them. Since *Sanmao* was the result of increasing interest within Chinese urban society in images and in children, it is useful to analyze its content in relation to the most popular representations of children in contemporary China. What do images tell us about children's culture in China? How did *Sanmao* challenge the idealized figure of the child offered by the press in the 1930s? In this section, I will show how Zhang Leping's representations of children differed from the model proposed by the press, making *Sanmao* an innovative product.

Visual representations of children became common in 1920s and 1930s urban China. While rosy-cheeked children had been for long a typical subject of Chinese New Year Prints (*nianhua* 年畫), new visual icons spread in the cities thanks to the urban consumption of products for children.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China*, 204.

<sup>70</sup> Chang-Tai Hung, "Repainting China: New Year Prints and Peasant Resistance in the Early Years of the People's Republic," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (2000): 770.

The middle classes' concern for the proper physical and moral growth of their offspring provided the basis for the appearance on the market of specialized foodstuffs and medicines, products that were advertised mostly through commercials representing healthy infants. The advertisement for the powder milk 'Lactogen', published in the magazine *Happy Family* (*Kuaile Jiating*, 快樂家庭) in 1937, is a classic example. In the picture a plump Chinese baby is depicted with a can of 'Lactogen', while in the corner of the picture a lengthy caption describes how powder milk full of proteins can help children to grow healthy (Fig. 15). These types of advertisements were widespread, to the point that together with modern girls, children became one of the most common subjects of advertisements in those years.



Fig. 15: Commercial for the powder milk 'Lactogen', produced by the Precious Company (*Gui gongsi*, 貴公司).

*Kuaile Jiating*, 快樂家庭 [*Happy Family*] Issue 6, 1937.

The renewed attention on children in China together with the development of an urban visual culture in the city resulted also in a flood of pictures of babies sent by parents to magazines and pictorials. In her article about toys and childhood in twentieth century China, Fernsebner described how in January 1927 the influential woman's magazine *The Young Companion Pictorial* (*Liangyou Huabao* 良友畫報) announced a 'Baby Contest' to elect a Chinese model child. On the occasion of the competition, 170 pictures of infants sent by proud parents were published in the pages of the magazine, while the readers were encouraged to express their

preferences (Fig. 16).<sup>71</sup> Similarly, during the 1930s *Morning News Pictorial* published several pictures of children sent to the paper by readers. Most of these photographs portrayed plump one-year-old babies; however, the pictorial published many pictures of older children, mostly dressed in western-style clothes and performing some patriotic activities, as in the case of the youngster playing the trumpet in a military fashion published in *Morning News Pictorial* in 1935 (Fig. 17). These pictures reflected contemporary discourse about the importance of the nuclear family in the strengthening of the Chinese nation. Familial peace, domestic management and children's health were considered essential elements for the success of the country and the survival of the nation. For this reason, these two pictures contained nationalistic implications: a well-managed modern household was necessary for the correct physical and intellectual development of children, and thus for the strengthening of the Chinese nation.<sup>72</sup>



Fig. 16: One of the little competitors for the *Young Companion's* competition, January 1927.

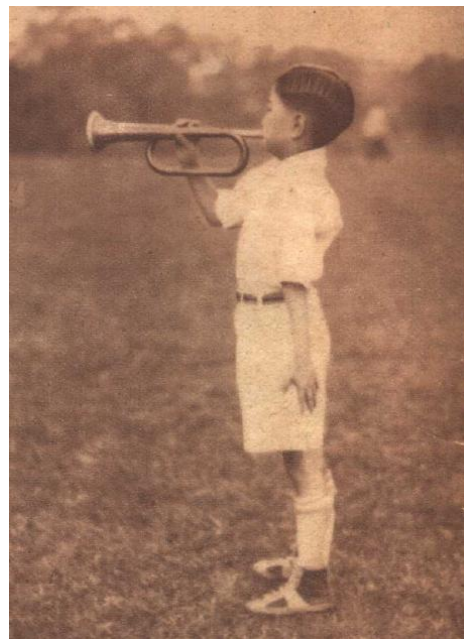


Fig. 17: 'Wake up Signal' (*Qishen hao*, 起身號). Picture sent by a reader and published by *Morning News Pictorial*, Issue 141, 1935.

<sup>71</sup> Fernsebner, "A People's Playthings," 280-281.

<sup>72</sup> See for instance Helen M. Schneider, *Keeping the Nation's House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

The image of the little boy with the trumpet recalls another child-type in fashion during the 1930s in China: the boy scouts (*tongzijun*, 童子軍). As well explained in the manual *Beginners Boy Scouts* (*Chuji Tongzijun*, 初級童子軍), boy scouts were founded in China in 1912 by Wuchang Culture University (*Wuchang Wenhua Daxue*, 武昌文化大學), five years after the creation of the scouts organization by the British Lieutenant General Robert Baden Powell (1857-1941) in 1907.<sup>73</sup> In 1933, the year in which the manual was published, there were more than one hundred thousand boy scouts in China, who swore to always be loyal Chinese citizens; to do their best to serve the people and to improve their knowledge and morality.<sup>74</sup> In the manual, the young boy scouts were often portrayed while taking an oath in front of the picture of the founding father of the Republic of China Sun Yat Sen 孫中仙 (1866-1925) and the flag of the Nationalist Party, or involved in other patriotic activities (Fig. 18).<sup>75</sup> Paul Kua has pointed out how many youth movements in Europe were influenced by Baden-Powell's Scouts; in particular both German Nazis and Italian Fascists formed their youth groups modeling them on the Scouts. Chiank Kai-shek's Nationalist Party followed their example, and in 1926 he included Chinese Scouting in the party structure.<sup>76</sup> In China boy scouts were directly connected with the Nationalist Party, which transformed them in a semi-militarized movement.

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<sup>73</sup> Hu Liren 胡立人, *Chunji tongzijun* 初級童子軍 [Beginners Boy Scouts] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Bookstore Company, 1933). However, the same edition was reprinted several times till the late 1940s.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>75</sup> For more information about scouting in China see also: Paul Kua, *Scouting in Hong Kong, 1910-2010* (Hong Kong: Scout Association of Hong Kong, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> Kua, *Scouting in Hong Kong*, 162-164.

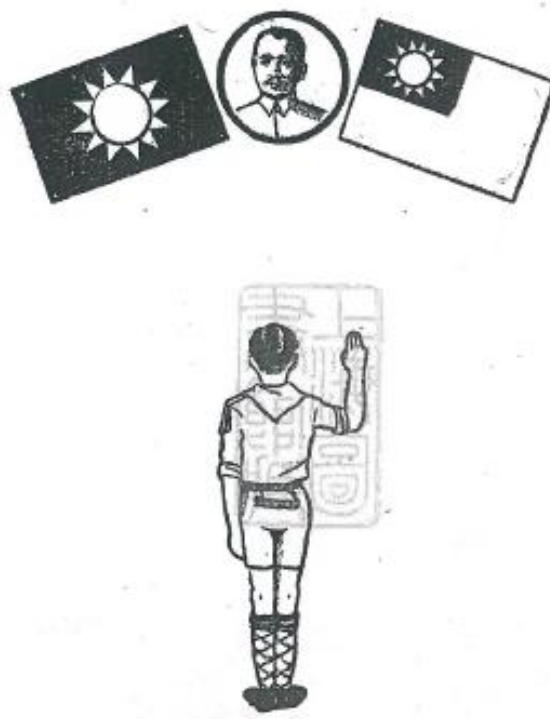


Fig. 18: 'Commemoration of My Oath' (*Wo de zhuanshi jinianri* 我的宣誓紀念日). From the Boy Scout Manual, 1933.

Contemporary films and literatures collaborated in the popularization of the image of the healthy, patriotic and diligent boyscout, which soon became a model of masculinity for middle-class children in China. For instance, in the movie *Little Playthings* (*Xiao Wanyi*, 小玩意), a young boy scout appeared in the last scene as symbol of the future of the Chinese Nation. The movie – whose political and social content has been analyzed in depth by both Susan Fernsebner and Andrew Jones – followed the tragic vicissitudes of a family of toy-makers, who lose their jobs because of the competition of foreign companies.<sup>77</sup> The story was an apparent call for the industrialization of China against the expanding presence of foreign imported goods, in order to guarantee a future to the nation. Significantly, the imported products around which the movie developed were toys, supposed to help children to develop into Chinese citizens. But how could a foreign toy help Chinese citizens? In the last scene of the movie, the hope of the country appears as a boy scout, who buys a toy from the unlucky toy-maker, asking the question any Chinese child should raise: 'Is this a National product?'. Clearly, *Little Playthings* celebrated boy

<sup>77</sup> *Little Playthings*, 1933, by Sun Yu 孫瑜. The content of the movie and a detailed analysis are contained in the above quoted article of Susan R. Fernsebner and in Andrew Jones's *Developmental Fairytales*.

scouts as model citizens, praising at the same time the Nationalist Party for forming the members of the new generation into modern, patriotic individuals.

A different image of childhood, in contrast to the stereotyped and politicized representations of children proposed by the commercial press and in the idealized image of the boy scout, was presented by the renowned artist Feng Zikai. In his 'Zikai's Sketch', the artist underlined the purity and perfection of the child's world.<sup>78</sup> In his lyrical sketches, Feng Zikai mostly portrayed his sons' daily life, from which he drew inspiration for his work about childhood innocence and freedom. One of Feng's most famous representations of children's innocence was his *manhua* titled 'I want!' (Yao! 要!), in which the artist depicted his son innocently asking his mother to catch the moon for him (Fig. 19).<sup>79</sup> In all his works Feng Zikai described childhood as the golden age, fostering the well established mythology of children's innocence. For instance, the artist dedicated several of his lyrical *manhua* to childhood, since according to his thought 'Only children are truly innocent and romantic, they are fully developed, only they are real people'.<sup>80</sup>

Feng Zikai's idea about childhood innocence and his idealization of the children's world were influenced by the ideas of May Fourth intellectuals, but in contrast to their educational aims, the artist's production was devoid of any didactic content, since he believed that children were already perfect in their complete innocence. Logically he also aimed to create an artistic representation of the world as seen by kids, producing a lyrical representation of reality. Feng Zikai's artistic and poetic view of children was deeply influenced by the scholar and art critic Wang Guomei 王國維 (1877-1927), who considered the purity of "the childlike heart" (*chizi zhi xin*, 赤子之心) as the only source of artistic genius.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Feng Zikai started publishing his "Zikai Sketches" in 1925 on *Literature Weekly* (*Wenxue Zhoubao* 文學周報).

<sup>79</sup> Barmé, *An Artistic Exile*, 145.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>81</sup> Wang Guomei was inspired by the thought of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) about genius, play and childhood. Barmé, *An Artistic Exile*, 135.





Fig. 19: Feng Zikai. 'I Want!' (*Yao!*, 要!), 1932.<sup>82</sup>

In the 1930s, the years in which *Sanmao* first appeared in the press, the major Chinese intellectuals working on children's literature became progressively more critical towards the idealistic depictions of children which they had endorsed in 1920s.<sup>83</sup> Irrespective of their opinion Chinese popular literature and the commercial press continued to portray idealized images of young consumers. Furthermore, the political value of children was strongly manipulated by the Nationalist Government through the glorification of the boy scouts and patriotic celebrations such as Children's Day. In this context, Zhang Leping's approach appears extremely original. *Sanmao* stood out from the images proposed by the commercial press, since it was not comparable to the model children smiling at the readers from the pages of popular periodicals. With *Sanmao*, Zhang Leping presented to the public the caricature of a child, attentively stressing all the physical characteristics which distinguished him from an adult. *Sanmao*'s big head, disproportionate body and sparse hair gave to the little hero an incongruous look, very far from those children represented in traditional *nianhua* or in the commercial press.

<sup>82</sup>From Barmé, *An Artistic Exile*, 145.

<sup>83</sup>As we will see, Lu Xun and Ye Shengtao changed their style in the 1930s, when they abandoned they applied to children literature a stronger social commitment.

In several strips, Sanmao fights with his appearance, since it does not fit the model proposed by the press. In order to appear better, he tries to curl his hair, to dress in nicer clothes and to look physically stronger. But his attempts to look like the magazine children of the magazines were often unsuccessful. For instance, in one strip entitled 'Studying Fashion' (*Xue shimao* 學時髦), Sanmao makes his hair curly according to the fashion of those years, with ridiculous results (Fig.20). The fashion for curly hair was introduced in China during the 20s, and it was adopted by trendy girls in Shanghai. Moreover, probably following the example of the famous child-star Shirley Temple (1928-2014), several of the children portrayed in glamorous pictorials had curly hair.<sup>84</sup>

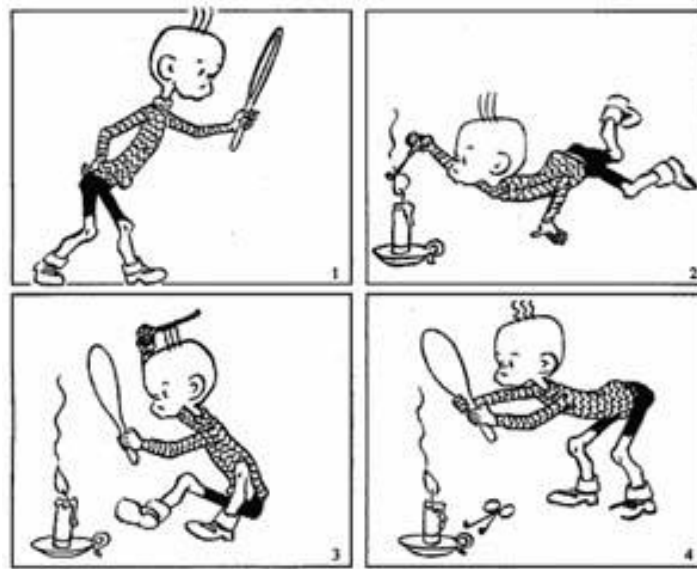


Fig. 20: Zhang Leping. 'Studying Fashion' (*Xue shimao*, 學時髦), 1935.<sup>85</sup>

His funny hair was only one of Sanmao's problems. In several strips, the little hero drinks every sort of miraculous medicine in order to strengthen his thin body, invariably with disappointing outcomes. In one of the strips, Sanmao becomes upset about his body shape after looking at the picture of a strong muscular boy. After stripping himself, he realizes that he looks scrawny and very different from the image in the poster. As a result, the child vents his disappointment against the mirror (Fig. 21). With these strips, Zhang Leping underlined the excessive

<sup>84</sup> Alys Eve Weinbaum, ed. and Modern Girl around the World Research Group, *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 201. The popularity of Shirley Temple and her influence on Chinese popular culture will be discussed partially in this chapter and in one of the following chapters of the thesis.

<sup>85</sup> Zhang Leping, *Wo de manhua shenghuo*, 22.

importance attributed by the press to the appearance of children, satirizing the content of advertisements and the influence of fashion icons.

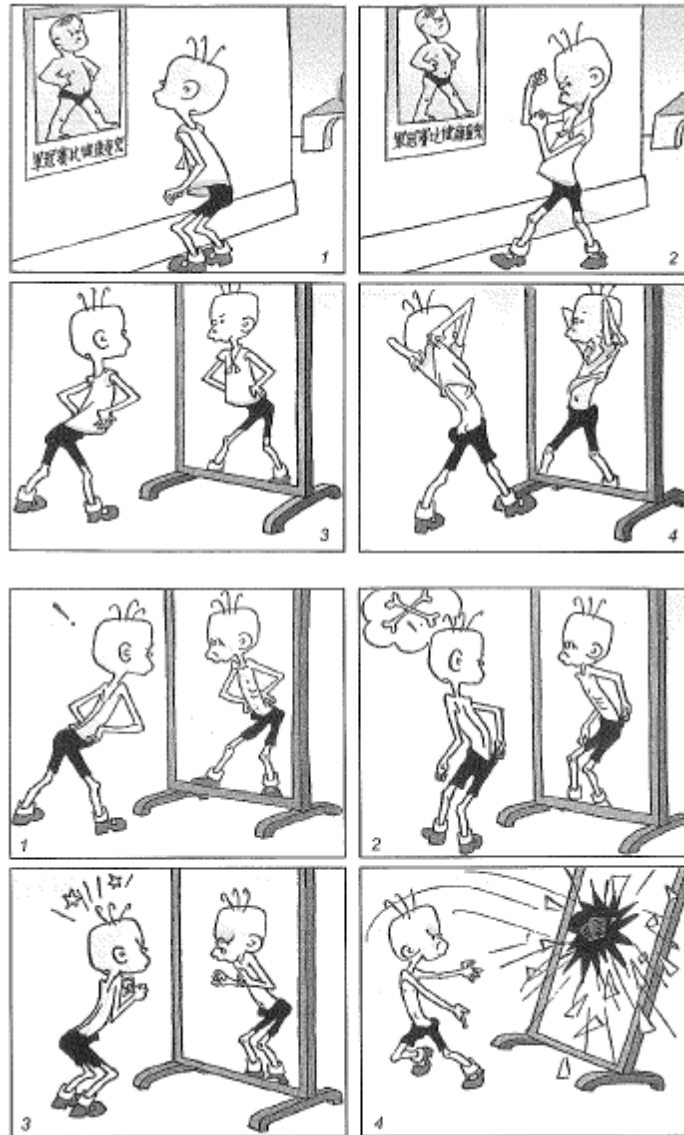


Fig. 21: Zhang Leping, *Sanmao*, 1935.<sup>86</sup>

Besides his appearance, Zhang Leping's creature distinguished himself from the children contemporarily celebrated in visual media by his naughty – at times mischievous – personality. In this respect, *Sanmao* – as if in a distorted mirror – shared many features with Feng Zikai's

<sup>86</sup> Zhang Leping, *Sanmao jiefang ji* 三毛解放記 [Sanmao Liberation Diary] (Shanghai: Shaonian ertong chubanshe 2005), 42-43.

young models, whose innate innocence made them think outside social conventions.<sup>87</sup> In 1936, the acclaimed cartoonist Wang Zimei analyzed the contents of five the most famous Chinese cartoons heroes of the time: *Mr Wang*, *Bull Nose*, *Sanmao*, *Ah Dou* and *Miss Honey*. In the section dedicate to Zhang Leping's work, Wang Zimei pointed out:

Thanks to his innocence, he [Sanmao] can satirize the unsatisfactory conditions of our society. Sanmao's innocence, straightforwardness, love and purity help us to understand the wild and unreasonable life of t adults. The candid actions of the little child display natural human feelings, while the falsehood of the adults is very far from human nature. Zhang Leping keeps in mind this idea while drawing his cartoons, and thanks to Sanmao's innocence he gives a slap in the face of our corrupted society. Therefore, Sanmao presents two layers: on one side we can cry and laugh reading the adventures of the child; on the other we can see through the child's innocence the dark problems of our society (...)<sup>88</sup>

In this article, Wang underlined the power of childhood innocence, through which Zhang Leping commented and satirized adult shortcomings. This tendency was particularly evident in those comic strips where Sanmao involuntarily breaks some of the most common social rules, like in the case of the strip about the celebrations of Double Ten Day (*Shuangshi jie*, 雙十節) published by *Shanghai Sketch* in 1936. Double Ten Day, celebrated the start of the Wuchang Uprising (*Wuchang qiyi*, 武昌起義) on 10 October 1911 (and thus the name), an event that led to the establishment of the Republic of China. This celebration was often associated with a specific symbol – the Double Ten – a result of the connection between two Chinese characters for 'ten' 十+十*shishi*. In the strip – which in this case should be read vertically starting from the right side<sup>89</sup> – Sanmao decides to commemorate Double Ten Day with his young friends; however their good intentions lead to unexpected consequences. For instance, Sanmao guides the other kids to a

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<sup>87</sup> Barmé, *An Artistic Exile*, 147. Feng Zikai's work was deeply inspired by Buddhism, therefore he connected children's indifference to social conventions with *samadhi*, 'selflessness'.

<sup>88</sup> Wang Zimei, "Wu zhong lianhuan manhua," *Shanghai Manhua*, Issue 2, May 1936.

<sup>89</sup> In the 1930s, Zhang Leping was not systematic in the organization of the panels composing his strips. Sometimes the panels were supposed to be read from the right to the left, or vice versa. In this case, the panels should be read from the top to the bottom. In order to avoid confusion, the artist indicated the correct order by including numbers in each panel.

cemetery, where they steal two crosses; afterwards, the group decided to publicly celebrate Double Ten Day parading around the two Christian symbols. Their actions do not pass unnoticed; in fact the kids are soon discovered and punished by a policeman for their disrespectful behaviour (Fig. 22).

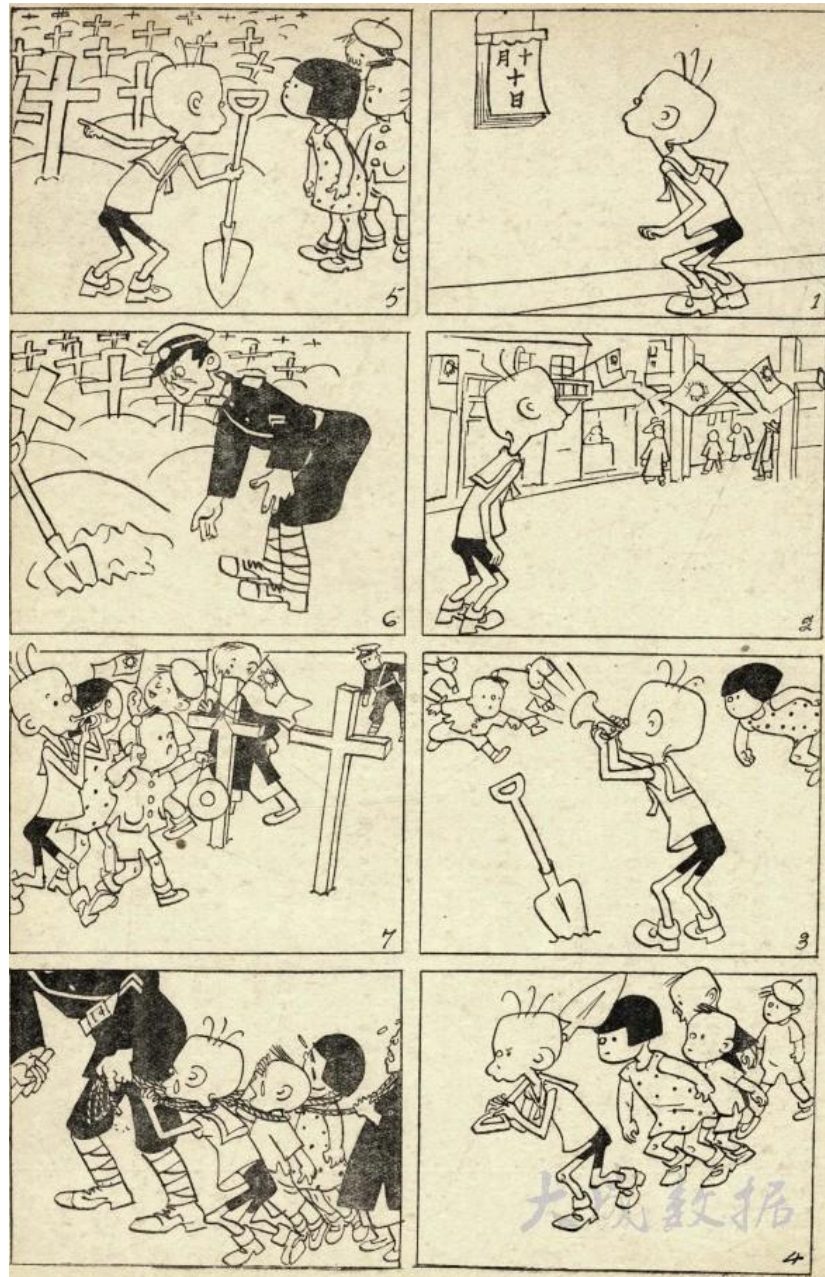


Fig. 22: Zhang Leping, 'Sanmao Celebrates the Double Ten Day' (*Sanmao qingzhu shuangshi jie*, 三毛慶祝雙十節).

*Shanghai Sketch*, Issue 6, 1936.

In this strip, Zhang Leping employs Sanmao's innocence in order to underline how some specific symbols are cherished by adults, whereas children – still not conditioned by social conventions – perceive the world from a different perspective, as described by Wang Zimei. Furthermore, the child's innocence was employed by the cartoonist in order to mildly criticize the Nationalist Government, whose political power – symbolized by the Double Ten and by the flag – is confused by Sanmao with the Christian symbol of death.<sup>90</sup> By including Christian symbols in his strip, Zhang Leping might have intended to satirize the political elite's belief that Christianity was a modern religion, more suitable for the Republic than traditional religions, now considered superstitious and backwards. Chiang Kai-shek also claimed to be Christian, as well as his father in law Sun Yat-sen and his family.<sup>91</sup> Perhaps Zhang Leping intended to comment on the rising influence of a foreign religion in Chinese politics. Certainly, in this strip the little hero's behaviour clashed with the depiction of children proposed by the Boy Scout manual, where the young scout ceremoniously takes the oath under the flag of the Nationalist Party and of the Republic of China.

In his article Wang Zimei stressed the role of Sanmao's innocence in the strips too much, whereas very often the little hero consciously misbehaves tricking his young friends and occasionally adults. For instance, in some strips published in *Shanghai Sketch* between 1935 and 1936, Zhang Leping's little hero appeared already 'corrupted' by adults, whose behaviors and wrongdoings he often imitated. On several occasions Sanmao's actions were not as innocent as one might expect; on the contrary the world of the little hero and of the other kids did not differ much from that of the grown-ups. Sanmao often deceives his young friends organizing fraudulent events in order to earn money: for example he asks his friends to buy a 'tour around the world' from him, which in reality turns out to be a tour around a globe (Fig. 23).

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<sup>90</sup> In the 1940s, Zhang Leping used the symbol of the cross in other two strips. His employment of this Christian symbol has always a double meaning: one side it symbolizes death, on the other it remained a symbol related to the Nationalist Party.

<sup>91</sup> Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 67-83.

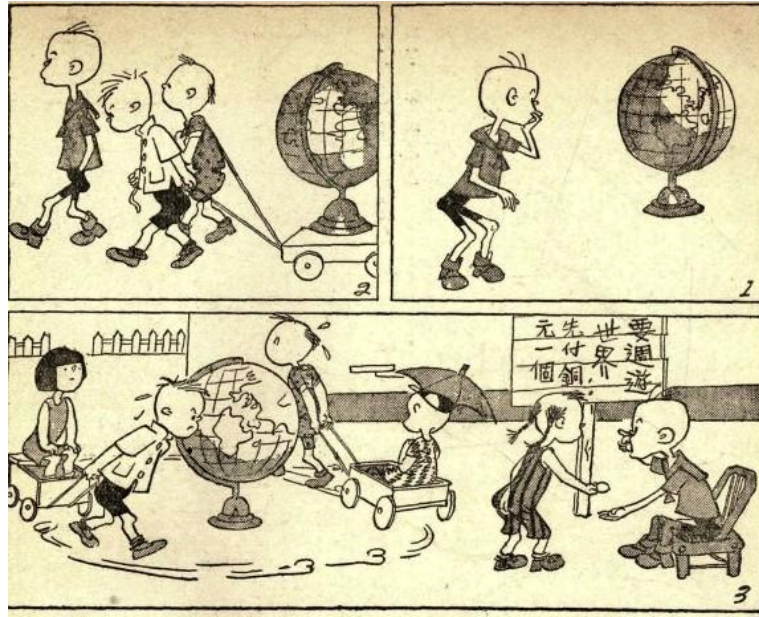


Fig. 23: Zhang Leping, *Sanmao*. The sign reads: 'If you want a trip around the world, first pay one yuan'. *Shanghai Sketch*, Issue 3, 1936.

Although Sanmao was the main protagonist of these strips, he was not the only child to plot mischievous actions; on the contrary, several of the kids moving around him often behave in a similar fashion. The cartoon hero lived most of his adventures in a 'children's world', which was not portrayed by Zhang Leping as an idealized reality, but as a mirror of adult society. For example, in one of his numerous adventures, Sanmao asks a muscular child to beat up a bully on his behalf, in return he promises his bodyguard an apple. Also in this case, the strip should be read from the top to the bottom, starting from the right side, as indicated by the numbers which appear in each panel. Sanmao goes back on his promise, and he eats the apple himself, provoking the anger of his 'employee'. Finally, our hero promises two apples to another young protector, asking him to punish his previous bodyguard. However Sanmao soon discovers that the two big kids are friends, and he loses his two apples without any reward (Fig. 24). In this strip, all the children on purpose act in an underhand manner, and in this case Sanmao does not appear as innocent as in the description by the cartoonist Wang Zimei.

These strips can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, they followed the humoristic rules of the *huaji*, where Sanmao is interchangeably the trickster or the tricked, playing the role of the clown *xiaochou* 小丑, who makes the public laugh thanks to his funny and mischievous ideas. In



this case Sanmao was not dissimilar from to other 'adult' cartoon characters such as Mr. Wang. On the other hand, both these strips offered an unusual representation of the child's world, which stood in opposition to the contemporary images of idealized childhood. For instance, Sanmao's world mirrored the adult one, providing his readers with a satirical comment on contemporary society. Sanmao's naughty personality not only was an essential component of the strips' humorous result, but also helped Zhang Leping's hero to emerge from the crowd of model children smiling from the glossy pages of popular magazines. Sanmao differed also from the children portrayed by Feng Zikai in his lyrical *manhua*, since Zhang Leping's cartoon hero – although still able to read the world with his childlike heart – appeared as already 'corrupted' by society, as the children's world was just a mirror of adult society.

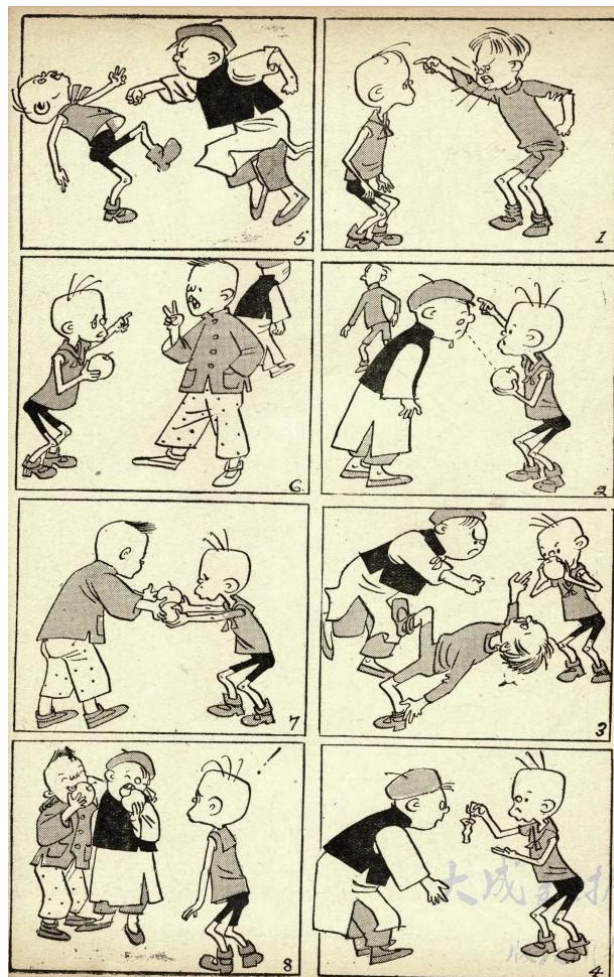


Fig. 24: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao*. From *Shanghai Sketch*, Issue 8, 1936.



These images presented above show how – although a product of commercial publishing – *Sanmao* comic strips commented upon the widespread representations of model children, going against the stereotypical vision of healthy and well behaved patriotic children. In this way, Zhang Leping employed a commercial product for children to express values quite opposite from those proposed by the commercial press. Furthermore, by including elements of political criticism in his strips, Zhang Leping's work could be considered as a product of revolutionary literary product for children, as pointed out by Wang Zimei. However, *Sanmao* comic strips did not contain two of the main features which defined contemporary revolutionary literature: concern for social issues and elements of class consciousness. Nevertheless, Zhang Leping demonstrated his ideas about the poor and his social commitment in other works he produced while drawing *Sanmao*.

## NOT ONLY COMMERCIAL ART: ZHANG LEPING, LEFT-WING CINEMA AND ORPHANS

The strips analyzed above engaged in politics to only a modest degree. For instance, 'Double Ten Celebration' (Fig. 22) was slightly critical towards the Nationalist Government, while many other strips presented a concern for social issues, since they represented the dark side of Chinese society. Certainly, the early strips of *Sanmao* were mostly humoristic, and light-hearted, lacking the political commitment which emerged in Zhang's work few years later. However, it is easily forgotten that *Sanmao* was not the only graphic work that came from Zhang Leping's pen in the 1930s. The artist was also renowned for his satirical cartoons addressing the problems of common people.<sup>92</sup> One of these, 'Sketch of a Pigeon House' (*Gelong sumiao*, 鴿籠素描), depicts a family sleeping cramped in a small room. This cartoon clearly drew attention to the difficult housing conditions of Shanghai's lower classes (Fig. 25).<sup>93</sup> It seems apparent that, while praising *Sanmao* for informing children about Chinese society, Wang Zimei probably had in mind also the other works of Zhang Leping and their socially concerned themes.

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<sup>92</sup> For a general view of Zhang Leping's production during the early 1930s see Ding Yanzhao and Yu Zhi, *Shanghai Memory: Zhang Leping huabi xia de sanshi niandai*.

<sup>93</sup> The same concept was used one more time by Zhang Leping in one of the strips of *The Wandering Life* entitled 'Late at night people are quiet' (*Yeshen renjing*, 夜深人静), *Dagong bao*, 16 July 1948.



Fig. 25: Zhang Leping. 'Sketch of a Pigeon House' (*Gelong sumiao*, 鴿籠素描), *Shanghai Sketch*, Issue 10, 1937.

One of the issues addressed by Zhang in his work was the endemic problem of orphan children in China, a theme which also appeared also in contemporary leftist children's literature. The condition of Chinese orphans and the development of a system of welfare have been studied by historians. In particular, the flourishing of welfare institutions for homeless children during the Qing dynasty has attracted the attention of scholars.<sup>94</sup> Homeless children appeared in Chinese literature before the twentieth century; for instance the first Chinese play to be introduced in Europe was the thirteenth-century dramatist Ji Junxiang's 紀君祥 'The Orphan of Zhao' (*Zhaozhi gu'er*, 趙氏孤兒).<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, it was mostly thanks to the translations of Western and

<sup>94</sup> Anne Behnke Kinney ed. *Chinese Views of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1995), 251-278.

<sup>95</sup> Liu Wu-Chi, "The Original Orphan of China," *Comparative Literature* 5, No. 3 (1953): 193-212.

Russian novels that the figure of the orphans entered Chinese popular culture in the early years of the new century. As pointed out by Xu Lanjunin, between 1903 and 1925 several novels featuring orphans as main characters became available to the literate Chinese public: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712-1778) *Émile*, Hector Malot's (1830-1907) *Sans Famille* were among the first western novels about orphans to be introduced in China thanks to the translations of Bao Tianxiao 包天笑.<sup>96</sup> Besides French examples, Russian literature also deeply influenced Chinese narratives of orphan-hood, like Leonid Panteleev's (1908-1987) novel *The Watch*, translated by Lu Xun in 1935.<sup>97</sup>

If the orphan-story genre in China was introduced by translators and intellectuals, the popularization of orphan characters should be attributed to cinema. Between the 1920s and 1930s homeless children appeared in several Chinese movies based or inspired by foreign novels. The movies produced during the 1920s – such as *An Orphan Rescues his Grandfather* (1923) and *A Little Friend* (1925) – were mostly concerned with middle-class children experiencing a temporary period without their family. In these years, the orphans of the silver screen were model children who could retrace their family thanks to their high moral standards. This trend changed in the 1930s, when leftist directors appropriated the image of the orphan producing politically engaged movies. Movie directors broke with the stereotyped portrayals of model orphans, turning towards more realistic description of the hardships suffered by homeless children. This change was due to the emergence in the 1930s of the Chinese Left-wing Dramatist Association (*Zhongguo zuoyi xijujia lianmeng*, 中國左翼戲劇家聯盟), a group of filmmakers deeply influenced by the May Fourth Movement's ideas and partially by Socialist and Marxist thinking.<sup>98</sup> Their movies – distributed by some of the major cinema studios in Shanghai – contained a sense of social mission, ethical dedication and elements of class consciousness.<sup>99</sup> Left-wing filmmakers borrowed ideas from both Soviet films and Hollywood productions. While

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 193-212. For more information about the novel *The Watch* see: Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 75-84.

<sup>97</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 45. See also Xu Lanjun, "Save the Children," 127-128.

<sup>98</sup> Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937* (Lanham, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 5.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 5

they admired the social commitment of Soviet movies, they often copied the style and techniques from of American blockbusters, which were the most popular films in Shanghai.<sup>100</sup>

An example of this tendency was Cai Chusheng's 蔡楚生 (1906-1965) *Lost Lambs* (*Mitu de gaoyang*, 迷途的羔羊), released in 1936 by Lianhua Film Company (*Lianhua yingye gongsi*, 聯華影業公司).<sup>101</sup> This movie was modeled after Soviet director Nikolai Ekk's (1902-1976) *Road to Life* (1931), a Soviet drama about the reformation of a group of homeless children in the post-civil war years.<sup>102</sup> In 1932, *Road to Life* was screened in Shanghai, obtaining positive responses from critics and public, so at the point that Cai Chusheng decided to produce a movie with a similar theme.<sup>103</sup> *Lost Lambs* followed the story of the child Xiao Sanzi 小三子, who after his parents' death becomes a beggar in Shanghai (Fig.26).<sup>104</sup> After saving a rich man from drowning in a river, the child is welcomed in the middle class family as a foster son. However, unjustly accused of stealing a ring, after a very short time he heads back to the street. In contrast to the cinematographic production of the 1920s, *Lost Lambs* lacked a happy ending. Chased by the police after stealing a loaf of bread, Xiao Sanzi and his orphan friends are caught at the top of a building. The last scene poses a question to the public: what future awaits these orphans? Is their criminal behaviour really their own fault?<sup>105</sup> Cai Chusheng's movie – as well as many others produced in the same years – presented homeless children both as a hope and a threat: while on one side homeless children embodied the future of the nation, on the other they were mostly destined to a criminalized life on the street. The main achievement of *Lost Lambs* was to connect the literary figure of the orphan with the real problem of homeless children in China, introducing the idea that orphans needed support from both the state and society. In his memoirs,

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 144-150

<sup>101</sup> Xu Lanjun, "Save the Children," 138-147.

<sup>102</sup> Kelly, *Children's World*, 200.

<sup>103</sup> Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema*, 145.

<sup>104</sup> A picture from the movie can be found in Cheng Jihua 程季华, ed. *Zhongguo dianying fazhan Shi* 中國電影發展史 [History of the Development of Chinese Cinema], Vol.1. (Beijing : Beijing Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1981), 422.

<sup>105</sup> Xu Lanjun, "Save the Children," 147. The end of the movie was criticized by left-wing critics, who expected the filmmaker to offer a solution to the orphans' problems. See: Hu Jubin, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 141.

director Cai Chusheng claimed that the aim of his movie was to describe the life of real orphans emphasizing the shortcomings of the welfare system which should educate and protect them.<sup>106</sup>



Fig. 26: A commercial for *Lost Lambs* (*Mitu de gaoyang*, 迷途的羔羊) directed by the leftist movie maker Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生.<sup>107</sup>

If *Lost Lambs* showed a very dark depiction of the life of orphans, in other movies social awareness was still present but mixed with less dramatic tones, like in the case of Yang Xiaozhong's 楊小仲 (1899-1966) *Little Orphan Girl* (*Xiao gunü*, 小孤女).<sup>108</sup> As stated by the title, the movie followed the life of the little girl Xiao Juan 小娟, who – after losing her parents during a flood on the Yangtze River – becomes a member of a gang of thieves in Shanghai. After being run over by a car, the girl is rescued by a doctor, who eventually decides to put her up in his house. For a time, she enjoys a comfortable life in her new family; but the thieves find her. Having discovered the child's past as a pickpocket, her step-father decides to send her back into the street, but the child redeems herself helping the police catching the gang and she is welcomed back in her foster family. *Little Orphan Girl* mixed the romantic vision of orphans with a more

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>107</sup> Chongqing Library website <http://2010.cqlib.cn/g.asp?cid=214>. Last access 6 May 2014.

<sup>108</sup> Yang Guo, *Bainian Leping*, 6.



realistic portrayal of their life on the street. Although Xiao Juan's experience in the doctor's home and the happy ending links this movie with the cinematographic production of the 1920s the story shared several motifs with *Lost Lambs*, especially the attempt to describe the potential process of criminalization of homeless children.

In 1936, Zhang Leping transformed the Xiao Juan story in a *lianhuanhua* published by China Books and Magazines Company (*Zhongguo Tushu Zazhi Gongsì*, 中國圖書雜誌公司).<sup>109</sup> In the booklet, the artist reproduced some of the cruelest scenes of the movie, such as the picture representing the orphan girl sleeping on the street with only a newspaper as a blanket (Fig.27). Zhang's interest in this project and his willingness to lend his own image and the one of Sanmao for the promotion of the movie are two examples of his interest in showing to his public the desperate problem of orphans (Fig. 28).

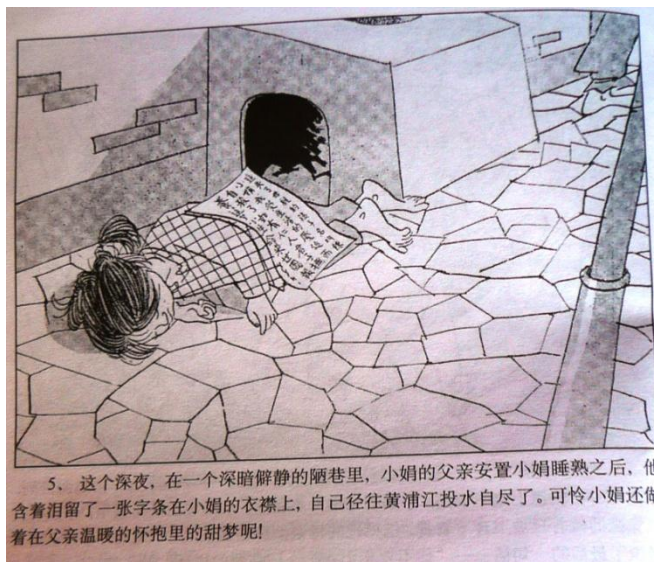


Fig. 27: Zhang Leping. *Little Orphan Girl* (*Xiao Gunü*, 小孤女), 1936.<sup>110</sup>



Fig. 28: Zhang Leping and the nine-year-old Chen Juanjuan 陈娟娟 main protagonist of the movie '*Little Orphan Girl*' (*Xiao Gunü* 小孤女).<sup>111</sup>

<sup>109</sup> The *lianhuanhua* has been republished in China: Zhang Leping, *Xiao gunü* 小孤女 [Little Orphan Girl](Shanghai: Shanghai huabao chubanshe,2000).

<sup>110</sup> The pictures come from Zhang Leping, *Xiao gunü* , 4.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 22.

Zhang Leping's interest in social issues make even clearer the reasons for Wang Zimei's opinion of the young artist's work: perhaps *Sanmao* comics were not works of revolutionary children's literature, but Zhang was clearly interested in social issues. The artist's production of cartoons about social issues; the political strips of Sanmao and his interest in left-wing cinema are useful hints in understanding the cartoonist's political ideas. From his production, it clearly appears that Zhang Leping sympathized with left-wing intellectuals and artists. As we will see, his contacts with left-wing circles would play an important role in the development of his career after the War of Resistance.

## A PRODUCT FOR TWO GENERATIONS

Wang Zimei praised *Sanmao* comic strips for their educative content. Certainly the advertisements for Zhang Leping's comic books showed that children were targeted as readers. However, Sanmao's fame was based also on his ability to cross generational boundaries attracting people of every age. There are many details which demonstrate that Zhang Leping's comic strips were not only a product for young readers, but mature public could enjoy them as well. For instance, some of the publications which hosted *Sanmao* strips between 1935 and 1937 were not conceived for children. One of the most famous magazines publishing Zhang's comic strips was the renowned publication *Shanghai Sketch*, popular also for its explicit decadent images of naked women as well as for its cartoons with a strong social and political commitment.<sup>112</sup> The little hero naturally attracted the attention of younger readers. In several strips, Sanmao was represented while interacting with his friends, children of different ages with which the little hero explored the city or simply went to school. In *Sanmao* schools, parks, streets and houses became the principal domain of a 'children's society', very appealing for the younger readers. Zhang's strips were also particularly attractive for children also because they did not require any reading skill. While in *Mr. Wang* written dialogues included in the strips were often an essential part of the narration, Zhang Leping did not include any speech-balloons in his comics, he just added a caption of maximum four characters outside the panels. If children were the 'natural' readers, how could Sanmao also attract the attention of the adult public of *Shanghai Sketch*? How could a child-hero be attractive for adults?

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<sup>112</sup> Ellen Johnston Laing, "*Shanghai Manhua*, the Neo-Sensationalist School of Literature, and Scene of Urban Life," Published by MCLC Resource Center, April 2009. <http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/laing.htm> last access 17 April 2014.

The publication of *Sanmao* in *Shanghai Sketch* or *Morning News Pictorial* could appear inappropriate if we think about Zhang Leping's comics exclusively as children's stories. However, *Sanmao* appears immediately more suitable for an adult public as we consider him as one of the many protagonists of the graphic *huaji* culture in vogue at the time. Chinese comic strips presented a series of urban types which the public could recognize, which helped the readers to analyze and understand contemporary urban reality.<sup>113</sup> If on one side Zhang Leping's decision to pick a child as the main character of his comics reflected an adult interest in the emerging children's culture of the time; on the other side to employ a child as main character of his strips allowed Zhang Leping to comment on urban reality from a fresh and unusual perspective, which could amuse and entertain children as well as adults.

To understand why children like *Sanmao* entered the Chinese entertainment industry in the 1930s, it would be useful to refer to a historical analysis of contemporary Western popular culture. *Sanmao* was not the first child character to attract the attention of a heterogeneous public. Children-heroes were very popular in the United States and in Europe. The first fictional child who conquered the readers' hearts in the United States was the Yellow Kid, the child protagonist of Richard F. Outcault's (1863-1928) comics *Hogan's Alley*, published for the first time in *Sunday World* in 1885. According to the comic-media historian Ian Gordon, Outcault managed to 'crystallize a succession of urban kid types' in the Yellow Kid, a poor child living in the chaotic reality of New York.<sup>114</sup> Outcault commented on the activities of the New Yorkers through the eyes of a bald, flap-eared naughty child wearing a long yellow gown. Certainly, the Yellow Child was just the first in a long list of children to become famous cartoon heroes in the United States. To mention a few, in the early twentieth century Outcault created his most popular child-character *Buster Brown*, while in the late 1920s Harold Gray (1894-1968) gave life to his famous *Little Orphan Annie*.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, in Great Britain children cartoon heroes appeared in *Tiny Tots*, very popular between 1927 and 1957.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Rea, "A History of Laughter," 218-219.

<sup>114</sup> Gordon, "Mass Market Modernism: Comic Strips and the Culture of Consumption," 53.

<sup>115</sup> Ress, "Bridging the Generation Gap," 782-800.

<sup>116</sup> James Chapman, *British Comics: a Cultural History* (London: Reaction Books, 2011), 29-30.



The success of the child figure in American popular culture during the 1930s is often associated with the Great Depression, which affected the social status of many individuals and threatened the unity of many families.<sup>117</sup> It was during these years of economic and social distress that children became the unchallenged stars of the entertainment industry. The already quoted *Little Orphan Annie* and the young American actress Shirley Temple (1928-2014) are two of the most famous examples. While Annie was a ubiquitous presence in newspapers, radio and eventually cinema, Shirley Temple was the biggest box-office star between 1935 and 1938. These two young girls were quite different from each other: the first was the main character of a comic strip which could hardly be defined as comical, whereas the second was a movie-star who entertained her public with comical sketches and tap dance. However, they also had much in common: both of them presented the physicality typical of children, but their characters were emotionally mature, they often acted like adults, not like children.

Several scholars have investigated the role of children in American entertainment culture during the Great Depression. For instance, Stella Ress and John F. Kasson analyzed the content and role of *Little Orphan Annie* in comic strips and Shirley Temple in films, reaching similar conclusions.<sup>118</sup> According to their articles, the role of children in popular entertainment during the economic crisis was necessary in order to reconnect adults and children in a period of social crisis. Furthermore, these child stars appeared always very mature for their age, and they helped adults to confront their emotional needs and to resolve their problems. Thanks to their ability to conciliate the tastes of adults and children and to present to grownups a reassuring vision of children, *Little Orphan Annie* strips and Shirley Temple's movies managed to attract a public composed of members of different generations.

The success of American child-heroes among younger and adult readers was not a case; on the contrary, these strips were often conceived in order to be accessible and enjoyable for a mixed public. For instance, Gray's comic strips *Little Orphan Annie* were originally addressed only to children, but since 'only adults had the money to buy the paper regularly', newspaper editors

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<sup>117</sup> Ress, "Bridging the Generation Gap," 782-800.

<sup>118</sup> John F. Kasson, "Behind Shirley Temple's Smile: Children, Emotional Labor, and the Great Depression", *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present and Future*, ed. James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman and Michael O'Malley (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 783.

asked the cartoonist to produce daily comics which could appeal also to adult readers.<sup>119</sup> From that moment on, *Little Orphan Annie* started addressing social and political issues, employing long dialogues in the narrative. Nevertheless, the heavy-handed content of the strips did not cause a decrease in the number of young readers, since the strips were made more attractive for children through the introduction of images of animals and action scenes. Carefully mixing social topics with more entertaining scenes, Gray managed to channel the attention of children as well as their families.

Similarly, Zhang Leping's young hero was just one of the children who entertained the Chinese public during the 1930s. For instance, child-stars such as Shirley Temple and her Chinese clone Hu Rongrong 胡蓉蓉 (1929-) became very popular in Shanghai, to the point that prestigious magazines like *The Young Companion* dedicated several pages to their careers.<sup>120</sup> The influence of the American model of entertainment on Chinese urban culture was massive. It is no coincidence that in the movie *Little Orphan Girl*, as well as in Zhang Leping's *lianhuanhua* based on the movie, the young protagonist Xiao Juan 小娟 appeared dressed up in Shirley Temple-fashion once adopted by a rich family (Fig.29).<sup>121</sup> In the case of *Little Orphan Girl*, the reference to the American actress was an attempt to ridicule the excessive westernization of the rich Chinese family. However it also demonstrates how children had become an essential element of adult entertainment in China too.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 783.

<sup>120</sup> Shirley Temple appeared in several occasion on magazines dedicated to cinema and entertainment. Hu Rongrong was also very famous in the 1930s. For instance, *The Young Companion* published her pictures in 1937, calling her 'Little Star' (*xiao nǚxing*, 小女星).

<sup>121</sup> San Mao will be the protagonist of a similar scene in the movie of *The Wandering Life of San Mao* in 1948.



Fig. 29: Zhang Leping. Image from the *lianhuanhua* *Little Orphan Girl* (*Xiao gunü*, 小孤女), 1936.<sup>122</sup>

Although *Sanmao* comic strips did not follow the American models, they shared some features with *Little Orphan Annie*. Although in 1935 and 1937 China was on the brink of the Second Sino-Japanese War, *Sanmao* was not a wise child able to solve adult problems. However, thanks to his character, Zhang Leping offered to his public a view of the world seen by a child, giving the opportunity to his young character the opportunity to express his opinion about his grownup readers. While contemporary representations of kids and children's literature were designed by adults to establish a model for the growth of the younger Chinese citizens, *Sanmao* gave a child the opportunity to satirize adults and to challenge social conventions. From this perspective, we can see that *Sanmao* represented an interesting twist in the perception of children, since Zhang Leping made them the real autonomous protagonists of the story. Similarly to his American colleagues, the comics of the little hero helped adults and children to connect, opening each other's eyes on their separate but linked worlds.

<sup>122</sup> Zhang Leping, *Xiao gunü*, 12.

Zhang Leping's strips shared also similar technical devices with *Little Orphan Annie*. As in the case of the American strips, *Sanmao* comics often presented two layers, one more suitable for an adult public and another more appropriate for children. The strip about the 'Double-ten Celebration' analyzed in the previous pages (Fig. 22) provides a suitable example: most probably children did not understand the political message of this strip, but enjoyed Sanmao's silly idea, while the mild criticism hidden in the story was pretty straightforward for adults. By contrast, several strips were carefully constructed in order to attract children, like in the case of Sanmao and the 'bullies' (Fig. 24). However, adults could also have a laugh at the misadventures of the little hero.

The strip published in the issue number seven of *Shanghai Sketch* in 1937 is a useful example for understanding the different layers of interpretation of Zhang Leping's comics. This issue of *Shanghai Sketch* was dedicated entirely to the concept of *wangbadan* 王八蛋, an expression that literally means the turtle's eggs, but which has also a much less innocent meaning. In Chinese, *wangbadan* is grave insult when used to indicate a person, generally a male, it means 'son of a prostitute'. All the artists working for *Shanghai Sketch*, included Huang Yao and Ye Qianyu, produced for the occasion several cartoons which played on the different meanings of *wangbadan*, sometimes with political implications, but mostly to entertain the public. Zhang Leping also published a strip dedicated to the double life of the unfortunate turtle. Sanmao is sketching a portrait of a pretty girl, when a large unpleasant man asks for a portrait too. Sanmao follows his orders, with an amusing result: the child represents the man as a big turtle, partially because his body-shape and clothes resemble the figure of the animal, but mostly with the intention of offending his model (Fig. 30). For an adult public, Sanmao's joke was certainly very clear: the child insults the man strongly, and he knows it, since in the last panel he runs away mocking his victim. But how clear was the joke for a child? Most probably, children could not understand fully the meaning of the story, but they could still enjoy Sanmao's joke, portraying the man as a giant turtle. Young readers could enjoy the little hero's silly idea without necessarily understanding the meaning of the turtle in Chinese popular culture. This strip contained also a subtle political message. The man's clothes and his bulky body suggest that he comes from a wealthy background. Calling him a *wangbadan*, Sanmao also ridicules the enriched urban elite, displaying the cartoonist's point of view on Shanghai society.

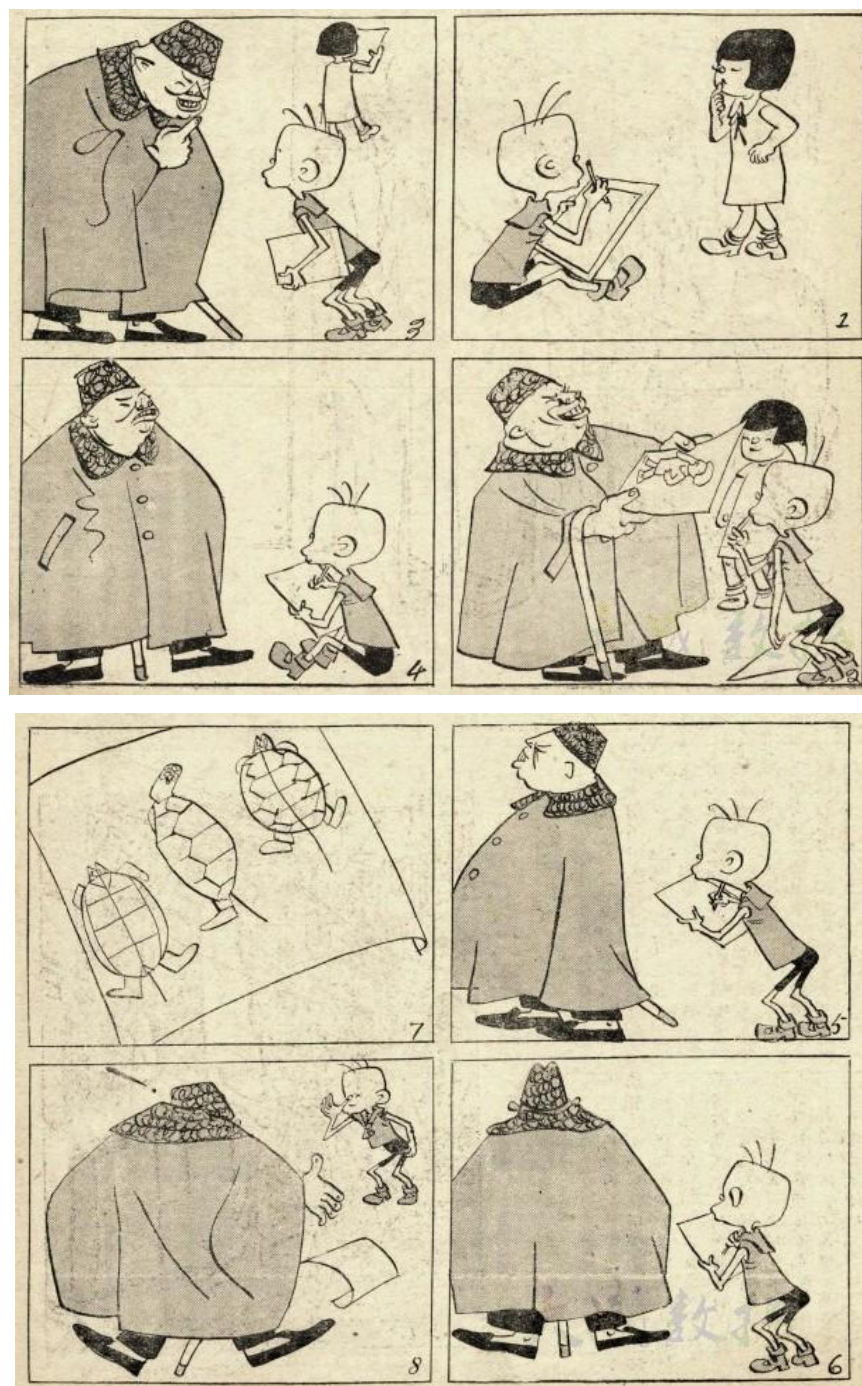


Fig. 30: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao*, *Shanghai Sketch*, Issue 7, 1937.

Sanmao entertained its adult public by also making fun of all the little obsessions of adults towards their children. For example, overprotection and excessive trust in modern science were the topic of a strip entitled 'To make the things happen' (*Wujinqiyong*, 物盡其用). In the first

panel, Sanmao's father gives the child a new raincoat. He dresses up his son in his new clothes, and the child is ready to go out. But the child is soon disappointed, since the sun is shining, and the raincoat appears to be useless. So, in order to give a purpose to his new purchase, the little hero changes weather, attaching to his back a watering-can sprinkling water on his new coat (Fig. 31). At first sight, the strip seems to make fun of Sanmao's plan to alter the weather conditions. However, from same images it is possible to see how Zhang Leping was also making fun of adults. The child's father buys a modern raincoat, which suddenly seems indispensable in Sanmao's life, at the point that he covers the child with it even if outside the sun is shining. Presumably, he has heard that the weather is changing, that maybe it is going to rain, and he wants Sanmao to be ready for anything. His behaviour underlines both the excessive care adults take of children and the sudden need for objects that are not so vital for their wellbeing. Unknowingly, Sanmao mocks the adult's need to protect him from non-existent dangers, provoking the problem himself. Furthermore, unlike his father, the child takes literally what is written on the box: if it is a raincoat, it has to be worn only when it is raining. In this, besides the humorous content which offered young readers an occasion to smile, the strip also invited adults to reflect on their overprotective behaviour towards their children, who appear able to live without many of the new modern accessories.

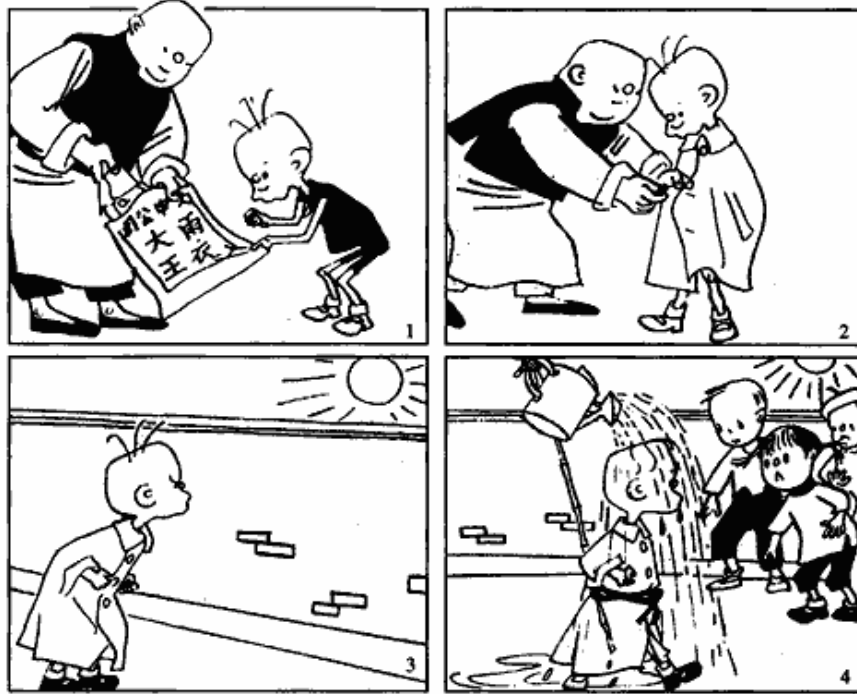


Fig. 31: Zhang Leping. 'To make the things happen' (Wujinqiyong, 物盡其用), 1935.<sup>123</sup>

While Zhang Leping's strips commented on the idiosyncrasies of Chinese contemporary society; however, their popularity among adults and children was mostly connected to the humoristic power of the stories and Sanmao's cuteness. Children were attracted by the little hero's funny inventions, which they would have loved to emulate. Adults loved the strips for their political content and also for their cute representation of childhood. They could forgive Sanmao's mischief because of his age. While characters like Mr. Wang were funny, but not really likable, Zhang Leping's little hero appeared cute even while committing some mischievous trick. Furthermore, the presence of other children in the strips, their reactions to Sanmao's ideas and their willingness to follow him in his adventures made the strips enjoyable reading for both younger readers looking for heroes of their age, and for adults who enjoyed discovering the world again through a child's eyes.

The success of these strips was based on the double nature of Sanmao comics, the cuteness of their main hero and Zhang Leping's ability to create vivid portrayals of children managing to engage a mixed public of children and adults. From the beginning, Zhang Leping managed to

<sup>123</sup> Zhang Leping, *Wo de manhua sheghuo*, 21.

entertain and inform people from different age groups thanks to his skill in mixing elements of children's literature and graphic satire. Furthermore, in these strips children are portrayed as active subjects, able to criticize and interpret adults' shortcomings. Thanks to these characteristics, Sanmao managed to be equally famous among children and adults, a situation which boosted the popularity of Zhang Leping's comics at the end of the War.



## CHAPTER 2: FROM ENTERTAINMENT TO PROPAGANDA: THE POLITICAL TURN OF ZHANG LEPING'S COMIC ART DURING THE SECOND SINO-JAPANESE WAR (1937-1945)

The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) changed the life of Shanghai's cartoonists deeply. As several scholars have pointed out, the dawn of the War of Resistance saw the beginning of an extreme politicization of Chinese cartoons, which from being mainly products for entertainment, became successful tools for the propagation of anti-Japanese slogans. In 1937, Ye Qianyu, Zhang Leping and several other influential cartoonists founded the National Salvation Cartoons Propaganda Corps (*Jiuhang manhua xuanchuan dui*, 救亡漫畫宣傳隊) with the aim of educating the population about the reality of war through powerful images. Since the historiography concerning wartime cartoons is fairly extensive, it would be pointless to discuss once again more the general significance of graphic production during the war.<sup>1</sup> However, Zhang Leping's contribution to the Cartoons Propaganda Corps has been insufficiently appreciated, and so this chapter examines how the Second Sino-Japanese War changed Zhang Leping's work and how these changes affected his later production. No longer tied so closely to the demands of the commercial press in Shanghai, the young artist abandoned the humorous tones of his previous strips, yet the war did not prevent him experimenting with different graphic media and rhetorical tools. In this chapter, I argue that although Zhang Leping's production during the war followed the demands of contemporary propaganda, many of the original themes and techniques which the author developed after 1945 had their origins in the wartime years. In the first section, I briefly describe Zhang Leping's life during the war in relation to his work as member of the Cartoon Propaganda Corps, while in the second part I describe how his artistic production changed according to the new wartime needs. The third section is dedicated to the central role of children in the propaganda campaign in general and in Zhang Leping's cartoons in particular. The process of politicization of graphic art, the introduction of new characters/heroes in cartoons and the increasing interest in children as agents for the construction of political ideas also influenced Zhang Leping's work also in the years which followed the end of the conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 95-150. Articles specialized in the representation of women and Japanese during the war: Louise Edwards, "Drawing Sexual Violence in Wartime China: Anti-Japanese Propaganda Cartoons," 1-24; Barak Kushner, "Unwarranted attention," 47-80. As for Chinese historiography, see Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*.

## ZHANG LEPING AND THE NATIONAL CARTOON PROPAGANDA CORPS

Cartoons are one of the most popular forms of art in the life of modern societies. In times of peace and prosperity, a cartoon grasps the weaknesses of the human world and – thanks to the amplifying power of humour and satire – it can criticize humanity, transform societies, and supervise politics. In time of war, a cartoon can stir up the feelings of the population, encourage soldiers to face death, increase the nationalistic feelings of the population, and blow up the enemy.<sup>2</sup>

The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) marked an artistic turning point for several cartoonists working in the flourishing publishing industry of Shanghai. Chinese cartoonists were not taken by surprise by the assault of the Japanese army. Popular cartoon magazines such as *Shanghai Sketch* and *Modern Sketch* had openly been publishing anti-Japanese cartoons for years before the Japanese attacked China.<sup>3</sup> However, the beginning of the war drastically changed the aims, content and style of cartoonists' work. Zhang Leping was one of the most active artists during the war. His work was not only strongly connected with the national propaganda campaign, but it was also influenced by his personal experience. What did Zhang Leping do during the war? Where did he work? An understanding of Zhang Leping's work and geographical movements as a member of the National Salvation Cartoons Propaganda Corps is essential in understanding of his wartime production. As pointed out by Rana Mitter, during the War of Resistance Chinese citizens moved incessantly around the country.<sup>4</sup> Zhang Leping was not an exception. To make clearer the artist's wartime experience, I briefly present the artist's activities and geographical movements in relation to the activities of the Cartoons Propaganda Corps.

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<sup>2</sup> Wang Dunqing 王敦慶, "Manhuazhan" 漫畫戰 [Warfare Cartoons], *Jiuwang Manhua* 救亡漫畫, September 1937.

<sup>3</sup> *Modern Sketch* and *Shanghai Sketch* published several caricatures of Japanese soldiers. Furthermore, they published caricatures of Hitler and Mussolini. Therefore, war was already a constant presence in these cartoons magazine much before the official outbreak of the military conflict.

<sup>4</sup> Rana Mitter, *China's War with Japan, 1937-1945: The Political Struggle* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).

The first to understand the significant role which cartoons could play during the war was the prominent cartoonist Wang Dunqing<sup>5</sup>, who immediately after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July 1937<sup>6</sup> summoned his colleagues to launch what he defined 'cartoon warfare' (*manhuazhan*, 漫畫戰).<sup>7</sup> His idea was to employ their artistic skills in order to serve their country supporting and educating the population. The answer of Shanghai cartoonists was immediate, as Wang Dunqing himself pointed out few months later in the preface to the first issue of the Shanghai wartime cartoon magazine *Salvation Cartoons*, published in September 1937:

From the battle at the Marco Polo Bridge, Chinese cartoonists established the 'Cartoon Salvation Society' (*Manhua jie jiuwang xiehui*, 漫畫界救亡協會) in the hope of going to the front and ready to start desperate cartoon warfare against the Japanese invaders.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of *Salvation Cartoons* was to be a means of communication for cartoonists, which could not only connect Shanghai-based cartoonists with the civilian population, but also with their fellow colleagues engaged in propaganda in different areas of the country. Unfortunately, this magazine had a very short life. In the same article, Wang Dunqing explained to his readers how during the First World War, Great Britain, France, United States, Soviet Union and Belgium successfully used images in order to demoralize their enemies.<sup>9</sup> The employment of straightforward images to bring patriotic messages to the population was a method massively employed during the Great War, when posters, leaflets and cartoons were considered useful tools for stirring the patriotic fervor of civilians and soldiers in Europe and in the United States. Even before the outbreak of the first global conflict, images were employed as propaganda instruments in time of war. For instance, during the French invasion of Russia in 1812, popular prints called *lubki* were widely used in order to spread nationalistic feelings among the Russian peasants.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Wang Dunqing (1899-1990) was a prominent Chinese artist. For more information about this cartoonist see Huang Ke, Gan Zhehu and Chen Lei *Lao Shanghai manhua*, 32-33.

<sup>6</sup> This was the first battle between the Republic of China's National Revolutionary Army and the Japanese Army considered as the marker for the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

<sup>7</sup> The concept of 'Cartoon Warfare' was employed for the first time by Wang Dunqing in the introduction of the first issue of *Salvation Cartoon* mentioned above.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Dunqing, "Manhuazhan".

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen M. Norris, *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity 1812-1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

However, scholars underlined how visual propaganda became an increasingly important instrument of information and canalization of meaning during the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> The visual turn of politics was due to the introduction of technological innovations and to the increasing importance of public opinion related to the rise of modern states, to the necessity to communicate with a large number of illiterates. The First World War was perhaps the first global event during which posters, leaflets and cartoons were employed massively on the battlefields and in civilian areas. For example, Uncle Sam, one of the most iconic images of American politics, was created in 1916 in order to recruit soldiers for the American Army.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, with the beginning of hostilities in China in 1937, cartoonists decided to follow the example of their Western colleagues creating images which could rally civilians and soldiers together to fight the enemy. The decision to launch 'cartoon warfare' led to the establishment of the Cartoon Salvation Society – officially known as the Cartoon Propaganda Team. Originally the group was composed of seven cartoonists: Ye Qianyu, Zhang Leping, Hu Kao 胡攷 (1912-1994), Te Wei 特偉 (1915-2010), Du Yuqun, Tao Lingye 陶今也 and Liang Baibo. The Corps grew larger once the artists were forced to flee Shanghai for the nationalist capital Nanjing. From the beginning, Zhang Leping played an important role in the organization of the Corps. He was elected vice-president of the organization, while Ye Qianyu held the position of president.<sup>13</sup>

At the beginning of their careers as warfare cartoonists, Chinese artists were quite disorganized and under-financed. After working for a few weeks in Shanghai, in August 1937 the Cartoon Propaganda Corps left the metropolis due to the outbreak of hostilities in the city. Wang Dunqing and some other cartoonists remained in Shanghai, but they also left the city a few months after. As many other city dwellers, the cartoonists moved to the nationalist capital Nanjing, in the hope of finding support for their propaganda activities from the government. This trip was the first of a long series of journeys which these artists had to take during the war. Once

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<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Revolutionary Tides: The Art of the Political Poster, 1914-1989* (Milano, Italy: Skira in association with Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, Stanford, Calif.: Distributed in North America by Rizzoli International Publications, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Joseph Nicodemus Cappozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 5.

in Nanjing, several other cartoonists joined the group, among them Liao Bingxiong 廖冰兄 (1915-2006), Ding Song 丁悚 (1891-1972), Xuan Wenjie 宣文傑 and Mai Fei 麥非.

Cartoonists were not alone in their fight against the Japanese, since virtually all the major Chinese intellectuals and artists were involved in propaganda efforts. Besides cartoonists, writers, dramatists, and actors formed their own corps in order to make their contribution to the national fight. Though virtually all had been influenced by the May Fourth movement's call for the modernization of the country, by the 1930s intellectuals were not pursuing the same ideals. While many intellectuals and artists supported the Nationalist Government lead by Chiang Kai-shek, who in 1934 promoted the revival of Confucianism as part of the project for the strengthening of the nation, others became members of the Communist Party. There were also a large number of intellectuals and artists – such as Zhang Leping and other cartoonists – who supported left-wing ideas of social equality, but were not members of the CCP.<sup>14</sup> United in the idea to strengthen their country, Chinese intellectuals and artists were far from pursuing the same political and social agenda.

The situation changed after the announcement in September 1937 of a new alliance between the Nationalist Government and the Communist Party.<sup>15</sup> The decision of the two parties to unite their forces against the Japanese led to the recruitment of intellectual and artistic members of the Communist Party, such as Guo Moruo 郭墓若 (1892–1978), who became the head of the Political Department in the Military Affairs Commission (*Junshi weiyuanhui zhengxunchu*, 軍事委員會政訓處), in charge of crucial propaganda work. Despite their political belief, now intellectuals and artists now had a common aim: to prepare the population for the fight against the Japanese in defence of their country. The establishment of the so-called Second United Front had positive effects for the war propaganda activists like the Cartoon Propaganda Corps, who could be officially recognized and financed by the Commission. However, during the war China remained divided – geographically and politically – into three major areas: regions occupied or under the influence of the Japanese (like the puppet government of Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883-

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<sup>14</sup> Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution*, 65-68; 161.

<sup>15</sup> The First United Front between the Nationalist and Communist Parties (1922-1927) was formed in order to fight warlords in China.

1944), areas under the control of the Nationalist Party, and regions managed by the Communist Party.<sup>16</sup> The Second United Front did not put to an end the political struggle between Nationalists and Communists, who continued fighting during the war despite their alliance.<sup>17</sup>

Before the Second United Front was established, cartoonists were quite disorganized and they had to fight in order to be recognized as members of the national propaganda program. Once in the capital, cartoonists had to solve two burning issues: on one side they had to convince the Nationalist Party to finance their project<sup>18</sup>, on the other they had to adjust their artistic production to their new working conditions and aims. Zhang Leping, together with Ye Qianyu and Te Wei asked for financial support from the head of the Central Propaganda Department of the Nationalist party, but their mission failed. Yet, few weeks later the group was authorized by the Nanjing Party Committee to organize a cartoon-exhibition at the Dahua Movie Theatre (*Dahua dianyingyua*, 大華電影院) in the city center. Though poorly financed<sup>19</sup>, the group managed to produce in one week more than two hundred images using all kinds of material, from paper to large pieces of cloth.<sup>20</sup> The exhibition was a success, and it attracted the attention of the Propaganda Department of the Military Commission, which officially included the Team in the propaganda work granting them 300 national dollars (*guobi*, 國幣) a month for material and personal expenses.<sup>21</sup>

The Dahua Movie Theater exhibition was the first of a long series.<sup>22</sup> Public display of images became the favorite methods of circulation of propaganda cartoons. Cartoonists often exhibited their works during the theatrical shows of drama troupes. In addition, they produced posters, pamphlets and banners which could be hung on every wall of the city. Since paper was becoming a very precious and rare resource, cartoonists learnt to use all sorts of material for their creations, such as huge pieces of cloth. Zhang Leping participated in several exhibitions, and he painted

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<sup>16</sup> See Stephen R. MacKinnon, Diana Lary and Ezra E. Vogel ed., *China at War: Regions of China 1937-1945*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 7-13.

<sup>17</sup> Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, 225-227.

<sup>18</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Hung. *War and Popular Culture*, 97.

<sup>21</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun. , *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 15.

<sup>22</sup> In November 1936, cartoonists organized in Shanghai the First Nationals Cartoon Exhibition. However, the exhibition organized in Nanjing was the first one held in wartime.

several cartoons on walls and big posters, as documented by numerous pictures portraying the artist while painting or displaying his works (Fig. 1).<sup>23</sup>



Fig. 1: Zhang Leping draws a propaganda cartoon on a wall in Changsha, 1938.<sup>24</sup>

Besides public exhibitions, cartoonists managed to print their own publications. When in December 1937 Nanjing was seized by the Japanese Army<sup>25</sup>, Zhang Leping and his colleagues repaired to Wuhan, the city which was the new provisional capital of the Nationalist Government. There, the cartoonists managed to launch *Resistance Cartoons* (*Kangzhan Manhua*, 抗戰漫畫), a fortnightly magazine published by the Shanghai Hankou Books and Magazines Company (*Shanghai hankou tushu zazhi gongsi*, 上海漢口圖書雜誌公司) which can be

<sup>23</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 45. This book provides with several pictures of Zhang Leping during the war. These images are preserved at the Zhang Leping's Memorial.

<sup>24</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 45.

<sup>25</sup> For more details of the military operations in China during the War see: Mark R Peattie., Edward J Drea; Hans J Van de Ven ed. *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011).

considered the political and artistic manifesto of the corps. As we have seen, *Resistance Cartoons* was not the first cartoon magazine published in war time, but it was the continuation of Wang Dunqing's attempt to reestablish the production of an official wartime cartoon magazine. In contrast to *Salvation Cartoons*, the new magazine was established under the official control of the Propaganda Section of the Nationalist Party, and it was led by Ye Qianyu (the chief editor) and Zhang Leping (the vice-editor). The strong association between the two publications was made clear by Ye Qianyu himself in the editor's preface to *Resistance Cartoons*, which he entitled 'The Second Life of *Salvation Cartoons*' (*Jiuwang Manhua de Dierge Shengming*, 救亡漫畫的第二生命).<sup>26</sup> Twelve issues of the new magazine were published in Wuhan from January to June 1938 while another three were published in Chongqing in 1940.<sup>27</sup> Besides being the vice-editor of the magazine, Zhang Leping was also one of the main contributors. Not only did he publish tens of drawings, but he also designed four out of the fifteen magazine covers (Fig. 2).

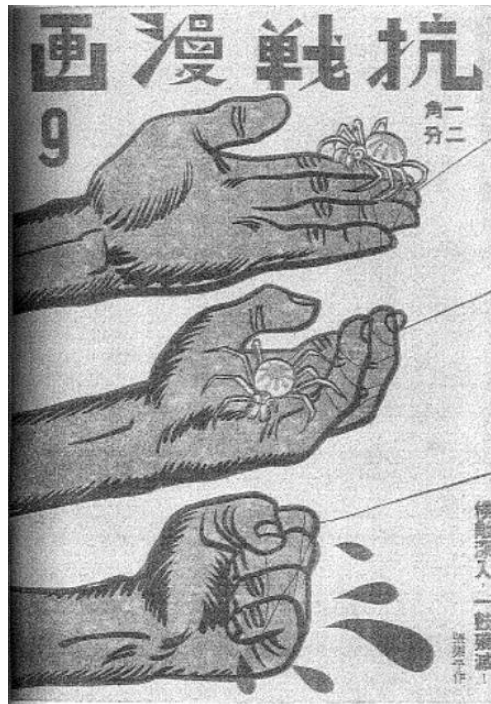


Fig. 2. Zhang Leping. Cover for *Resistance Cartoons*, Issue 9, May, 1938. The caption says: 'When the enemy comes, it must be annihilated with one blow!' (*Houdi shenru, yigu jianmie!*, 倭寇深入，一鼓殲滅!).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 125-126.

<sup>27</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 96.

<sup>28</sup> Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 229.



On 1 August 1938, cartoonists decided to participate in the attempt to organize a centralized propaganda campaign, led by the Third Section (headed by intellectual Guo Moruo) of the Political Department, established under the Military Affairs Commission of the Nationalist government.<sup>29</sup> During their stay in Wuhan, cartoonists organized several exhibitions under the leadership of Ye Qianyu and Zhang Leping, often collaborating with drama troupes.

During the war, Zhang worked in areas under the control of the Nationalist Government, moving around the country according to necessity and also on the basis of the Japanese advance. In the spring of 1938, Zhang Leping was sent with a group of other cartoonists to Xiuning County 休寧, in Anhui Province 安徽省 where they remained for a few months organizing public exhibitions. He came back to Wuhan for a few weeks before the Chinese troops evacuated the city, forcing the Cartoon Propaganda Corps to leave for Changsha 長沙. Not long afterwards, the cartoonists moved to Guilin 桂林, where they eventually decided to split into two main groups, which for the next seven years travelled around several provinces of the country. Zhang Leping led the first group, which headed towards the Third War Front<sup>30</sup>, where he worked almost till the end of the war. The second group, headed by Te Wei, stayed behind in Guilin, reaching the wartime capital Chongqing in early 1939. Although the members of the Cartoons Propaganda Corps worked separately in different locations around China, they remained united and could still benefit from the financial support of the Propaganda Committee. As for Zhang Leping, in 1939 he was based in Shangrao 上饒, a prefecture-level city in Jiangxi Province, where he became the main editor of the pictorial publication of *Frontline Newspaper* (*Qiangxian Ribao*, 前線日報) and *Cartoon Weekly* (*Xingqi Manhua*, 星期漫畫). Despite the difficult conditions in which *Frontline Newspaper* was published, it had an estimated daily circulation of 20,000 copies, distributed in several provinces: Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Suzhou, Anhui, Hunan, and Guansi.<sup>31</sup> In the

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<sup>29</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 50.

<sup>30</sup> The Third War Front included the areas of Zhejiang Province and southern Jiangxi Province. It was formed in 1937 on the basis of the Military Affairs Commission on moving troops in east China in order to stop the Japanese military actions in the Shanghai area. See: Peattie, Drea and Van de Ven ed., *The Battle for China*, 147-148.

<sup>31</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun. *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 50. *Frontline Newspaper* was one of the two official newspapers released by the Nationalist Part in the South-East area. The other newspaper was *Southeast Newspaper* (*Dongnan Ribao*, 東南日報). *Frontline Newspaper* was released in the regions of the Third Front.

summer of 1940 he worked mostly in Zhejiang Province 浙江省, in Jinhua 金華,<sup>32</sup> where he worked also with dramatists performing anti-Japanese plays. It was on this occasion that he met his future wife, the actress Feng Chuyin.<sup>33</sup> Between 1939 and 1940, Zhang Leping constantly moved between Jiangxi and Zhejiang, witnessing the soldiers' life on the battlefield and the outcomes of Japanese's raids on the population; which he described in two series of sketches titled, *Sketches from Zhexi Battlefield* (*Zhexi zhandi sumiao*, 浙西戰地素描) and *Zhuji after the Devastation* (*Jiehou zhuji*, 劫後諸暨).<sup>34</sup>

In 1940 the collaboration between the Nationalists and the Communists ceased to exist due to the continued clashes between their forces. With the crumbling of the United Front, Nationalists became increasingly more distrustful towards cartoonists' work, which they suspected of being influenced by Communist ideals. Eventually, the Guomindang leaders decided to freeze the economic aid to the cartoonists during the reshuffling of the Third Section by the Political Ministry, which brought also the dismissal of the communist president Guo Moruo.<sup>35</sup> These events caused several problems for the Propaganda Corps. For almost one year Chinese cartoonists fought for the survival of the group, but in July 1941 the Corps definitively ceased to exist. Zhang Leping received the news about the dismissal of the corps in Shangrao in late 1940. This was also the year in which he married the actress Feng Chuyin in Yushan. Despite the tough time and the scarce economic resources, they managed to organize a lively party. Zhang Leping sewed his wife's bridal gown from a white curtain (Fig. 3).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> During the war, the city of Jinhua was under the administration of Jiangxi Province, while nowadays it is situated in Zhejiang Province.

<sup>33</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 51-53.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 120.

<sup>35</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 121.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Zhang Leping's son Zhang Weijun, December 2013.



Fig. 3: Zhang Leping and Feng Chuyin's wedding, on 18 March 1941, Yushan, Jiangxi province.<sup>37</sup>

The end of Propaganda Corps and his personal life did not stop Zhang Leping, who continued producing warfare cartoons. After the Japanese invaded Shangrao in May 1942, the artist left the city and travelled to Fujian province. In August of the same year, he managed to organize at least three cartoon exhibitions in Ganzhou 贛州, in Jianxi Province. In the same year, the artist became the main editor of *Great Harmony Cartoons* (*Datong Manhua*, 大同漫畫), where he collected anti-Japanese cartoons and also some images against German and Italian Fascism. In the following years, he collaborated with the Seventh Drama Troup (*Juxuan qidui*, 劇宣七隊), for which he adapted several dramas, one of which was Xia Yan 夏衍's *Fascist Germs* (*Faxisi xijun*, 法西斯細菌). He spent the last months of war in Guangdong Province and in Hong Kong, and only come back to Shanghai in November 1945.<sup>38</sup>

The war united Chinese cartoonists, who through their art pursued the same propagandistic aims. However, besides political divergences – which became increasingly more important after the failure of the Second United Front – each cartoonist lived the war in different way. Zhang

<sup>37</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Most of the information regarding Zhang Leping movements and production during the war are provided by the book Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*.

Leping's years spent in Zhejiang and Jiangxi influenced his work deeply both during the war and in the post-war years.

## COMIC STRIPS AND HUMOUR DURING THE WAR OF RESISTANCE

Cartoonists were not alone in their attempt to inform the population about the need to fight against the Japanese; many Chinese intellectuals, dramatists and journalists collaborated in the propaganda campaign. Their major concern was to bring their message to the people in the fastest and clearest way possible. To achieve this aim, conventional forms of urban popular culture – such as spoken drama, graphic arts and journalism – were refashioned in order to communicate with the widest cross-section of the public.<sup>39</sup> In his work on the propaganda activities during the War of Resistance, historian Chung-tai Hung described the processes which led to the politicization of Chinese urban popular culture, which was refashioned by the resistance into a propaganda medium for both urban and rural public.<sup>40</sup> As we have seen, Zhang Leping was one of the leading characters of the National Cartoon Propaganda Corps, and his wartime drawings were often considered as model works by other cartoonists.<sup>41</sup> In this section, I analyze how Zhang Leping adapted his work to the wartime aims, pointing out how not only cartoons, but also other forms of graphic art – such as *lianhuanhua* and humorous comic strips – served to satisfy the new wartime exigencies. Analyzing the broader range of wartime visual media propaganda produced by Zhang Leping, we will see that not only cartoons, but various forms of visual art went through a politicization process during the war.

The Cartoon Propaganda Corps were part of an ambitious national propaganda campaign launched by the Nationalist Government and the Communist Party. Although the word 'propaganda' has a negative meaning of 'manipulation', in Chinese the corresponding term '*xuanchuan* 宣傳' refers to an 'act of persuasion, combining feelings and facts', as pointed out by

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<sup>39</sup> On the popularization of Chinese urban popular culture during the war see Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 51.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>41</sup> For instance, as we will see later one of Zhang Leping's pictures was selected for a cartoon exhibition in Moscow for representing the work of Chinese cartoonists, while several journalists acclaimed Zhang Leping dedication to his work.

Hung.<sup>42</sup> As we have seen, the nature of cartoons is political, since they aim at criticize something or somebody. However, at the beginning of the war Wang Dungqing pointed out that in time of peace the main aim of cartoons is to criticize humanity and reveal the shortcomings of politics through humour and satire; while during the war they should unite the population against a common enemy.<sup>43</sup> During the war cartoons did not cease to be critical; nevertheless they became propagandistic since they were the products of the government's organized wartime effort. Cartoonists could support different political ideas with their art, but in the early years of the war they worked under the Political Department in the Military Affairs Commission pursuing the common aim of defeating the Japanese.

Chinese wartime propagandistic efforts focused on three major issues: firstly, the resistance had the task of rallying the Chinese population together against the Japanese. Secondly, they had to make people aware of the new exigencies of wartime, such as the necessity to collect money for soldiers, to help the refugees, and to engage in the fight. Thirdly, propagandists tried to denounce traitors and profiteers. To convey these messages, Chinese propagandists had to select forms of communication and rhetorical tools of high emotional impact which were easily accessible to the public. In this context, cartoons were considered an effective means of communication by propagandists, since through standardized iconography and formalized rhetorical elements they could convey to the population messages related to the wartime situation. In 1938, cartoonist Feng Zikai explained why cartoons were suitable for propaganda purposes in *Resistance Cartoons*:

Cartoons are the vanguard of the brush stroke war of resistance. Their propaganda (dissemination) strength comes from sharpness, whose origin has two main features. First, cartoons are understandable at first look, no time is wasted. An article, even if very brief and poignant, requires at least several minutes of reading, whereas a few seconds are enough to look at a cartoon and understand its meaning and the implications. In busy

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<sup>42</sup> For a discussion on the aims and problematic of propaganda see: Lasswell Harold D, "The Theory of Political Propaganda," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Aug. 1927): 627-631. See also: Jacques Ellul, *Histoire de la Propaganda* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976). For the meaning of the Chinese term for propaganda *xuanchuan* see Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 5-6.

times like this, this kind of propaganda is the most effective. Secondly, cartoons are a universal language, which every compatriot can understand. One doesn't need to study characters to understand a cartoon; even the illiterate can understand this form of art. Therefore they can really reach the population. Even if many cartoons rely on words for better explanation of their meaning, they use few characters or they don't use them at all. Being clear to the masses at the first glance is the best quality of cartoons.<sup>44</sup>

With these words, Feng Zikai clearly illustrated why cartoons were selected as effective tools for the propagation of patriotic messages. Their ability to convey relatively complex messages overcoming the problem of illiteracy made them very powerful devices for wartime propaganda.

As we have seen, before the outbreak of the war Chinese cartoonists worked mostly in the entertainment industry of urban China (mainly in Shanghai, but not only); but their contribution in the propaganda campaign changed dramatically their *modus operandi*. In order to adapt their production to wartime conditions, cartoonists had to adjust their work in order to make it understandable also for a rural population. Although cartoonists worked in important urban centers during the war (Wuhan, Changsha and Chongqing to mention just some), they were mostly active in rural areas. Furthermore, millions of refugees moved from the countryside to the cities, increasing the need to create simple straightforward images which could be understood by a range of viewers. In order to communicate the hardship of wartime, Chinese cartoonists abandoned the popular *huaji* tones which inspired their work in the early 1930s for more dramatic contents.<sup>45</sup> While the English word 'cartoon' is generally connected with drawings containing humorous content, the images produced by Chinese cartoonists during the war were 'deadly serious'.<sup>46</sup> Although humoristic tones were rare, these illustrations stuck to the most typical characteristics of the cartoon genre: simple style, caricatured characters and straightforward iconography.

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<sup>44</sup> Feng Zikai, "Manhua shi kangzhan bigan de xianfeng" 漫畫是抗戰筆桿的先鋒 [Cartoons are the brush vanguard of the War of Resistance], *Kangzhan Manhua* 抗戰漫畫, April 1938. Reprinted in Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 2005.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>46</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 99.

Like other cartoonists, Zhang Leping also adapted his production to propagandistic aims: first of all, the protagonists of his cartoons changed from urban-types into soldiers, peasants and collaborators. Secondly, he left the humoristic tones typical of his pre-wartime work. Thirdly, besides publishing his work in magazines and newspapers, he participated in several exhibitions, often organized as side events of street-drama performances.<sup>47</sup> Finally, the author dedicated himself mostly to the production of single panel cartoons instead of comic strips. However, Zhang Leping did not limit his work to cartoons, but he also employed other graphic media.

As pointed out by Hung, single-panel cartoons involving a limited number of standardized heroes (and in the case of Japanese soldiers, anti-heroes) were the most widespread form of graphic art during the war. The most popular subjects were evil Japanese, together with Chinese soldiers, peasants and traitors.<sup>48</sup> These characters became part of a specific iconography of war. The emotions of the viewers were stimulated thanks to the crudeness of these images – which could be very gory – and through the dehumanization of the enemies, often portrayed in animalistic fashion.<sup>49</sup> In the choice of his new wartime characters, Zhang Leping did not distinguish himself from the other members of the National Cartoons Propaganda Corps. Similarly to his colleagues, he depicted in his single-panel cartoons mostly heroic Chinese soldiers, evil Japanese and courageous peasants. For instance, in 'Rise up, you compatriots who do not want to be slaves!' (*Buyuan zuo nuli de tongbao dou qilai le!* 不原做奴隶的同胞都起來!), the artist portrayed a Chinese soldier heading a crowd composed of civilians, including a woman. They march aggressively holding weapons and shouting, ready to fight with the army for the liberation of China from the Japanese (Fig. 4). 'Only if the Military and the People collaborate, will we eliminate the enemies' (*Weiyou junmin hezuo, caineng xiaotian diren* 惟有軍民合作, 才能消天敵人) is based on a similar concept. A soldier and a civilian – roles that are clearly marked by the characters *jun* 軍 and *min* 民 written on their jackets – collaborate in eliminating a Japanese soldier with a roller, on which we can read 'The power of the War of resistance' (*Kangzhan liliang*, 抗戰力量) (Fig. 5). These images differed greatly from Zhang

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>48</sup> As we will see, mothers and children were also popular icons employed in cartoon warfare, but I will address this issue in the next section.

<sup>49</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 106.

Leing's pre-war comics. Not only did the theme change from urban life to war effort, but the meaning and aim of these images was as straight-forward as possible. In his *Sanmao* strips, Zhang Leping proved to be a master in creating images holding several levels of interpretation; whereas straightforwardness was the main characteristic of his propaganda cartoons.



Fig. 4: Zhang Leping. 'Rise up, you compatriots who do not want to be slaves!' (*Buyuan zuo nuli de tongbao dou qilai le!* 不原做奴隶的同胞都起來!) *Resistance Cartoons*, 1938.<sup>50</sup>

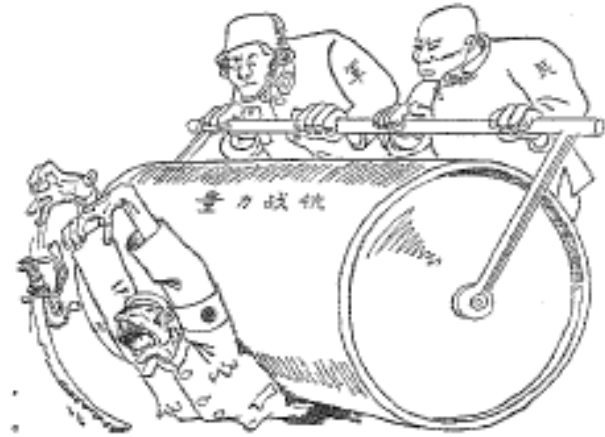


Fig. 5: Zhang Leping. 'Only if the Military and the People collaborate, will we eliminate the enemies' (*weiyou junmin hezuo, caineng xiaotian diren* 惟有軍民合作,才能消天敵人), *Resistance Cartoons*, 1938.<sup>51</sup>

Similar single-panel cartoons were hung on the street corners, painted on walls or displayed in public exhibitions; yet most of the wartime cartoons taken into consideration by historians were printed in magazines such as *Resistance Cartoons* or local newspapers. It is nevertheless possible to examine some of the cartoons which were exposed in public thanks to the photographic documentation left by several war journalists. For instance, in February 1939 the popular magazine *The Young Companion* published several pictures of propaganda cartoons painted on public walls. These cartoons were very similar to those produced by Zhang Leping: some of them represented proud soldiers fighting together with civilians, which was clearly one of the most common iconographical representations (Fig. 6).

<sup>50</sup> Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 66.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.





Fig. 6: Example of a propaganda mural. Image from the article "*Kangzhan bihua*" 抗戰壁畫 [Resistance Murals], in *The Young Companion*, February 1939, Issue 139.<sup>52</sup>

The simplification of images into a single panel promoting straightforward slogans was connected also with the need to reproduce images in public spaces. Hung pointed out that during the war single panel cartoons became the most popular visual propaganda medium, since they were more adapted for the rural public. However, also the technical conditions in which cartoonists were supposed to work also played a role in the simplification of images. Journals such as *Resistance Cartoons* created models, which were then also reproduced by amateur artists on walls. Nevertheless, the press allowed cartoonists to use more sophisticated graphic forms, such as multi-panel cartoons, comic strips and *lianhuanhua*.

To isolate single-panel cartoons as the only relevant propaganda graphic employed during the war is limiting. Certainly, since paper became a precious commodity during the war, to publish strips and comics became more complicated. Furthermore, being connected with the urban *huaqji* culture whose contents and aims hardly fitted the political agenda of propagandists, comic strips were a less appropriate means of communications during the war. Nevertheless, strips did not disappear, but were modified in order to match the propagandists' aims. For instance, comic strips remained part of Zhang Leping and other cartoonists' repertoire during the war, and some

<sup>52</sup> *The Young Companion* translated the title in English as 'War and Propaganda', changing slightly the meaning of the original Chinese version.

of these strips still employed humour as a rhetorical tool. At the beginning of the war, popular cartoon heroes like Sanmao and Mr. Wang entered the military forces together with their creators. As Zhang Leping and Ye Qianyu entered the propaganda corps, they decided to employ the images of their characters in order to invite the readers to join the war effort. In 1937, Zhang Leping published an image depicting multiple Sanmao marching in a military parade. Many of them marched with rifles on display on their shoulders, under the eyes of Sanmao dressed up as an officer (Fig. 7). Similarly in 1939 Ye Qianyu decided to transform his cartoon hero into a soldier. In this cartoon titled 'Abandon Civilian Life, Join the Military' (*Qiwen jiuwu*, 棄文就武), Mr. Wang marches with a rifle in his hand and the expression of a professional fighter (Fig. 8). In these two images we see how Zhang Leping and Ye Qianyu transformed their cartoon heroes from naughty characters into loyal citizens ready to defend their country.

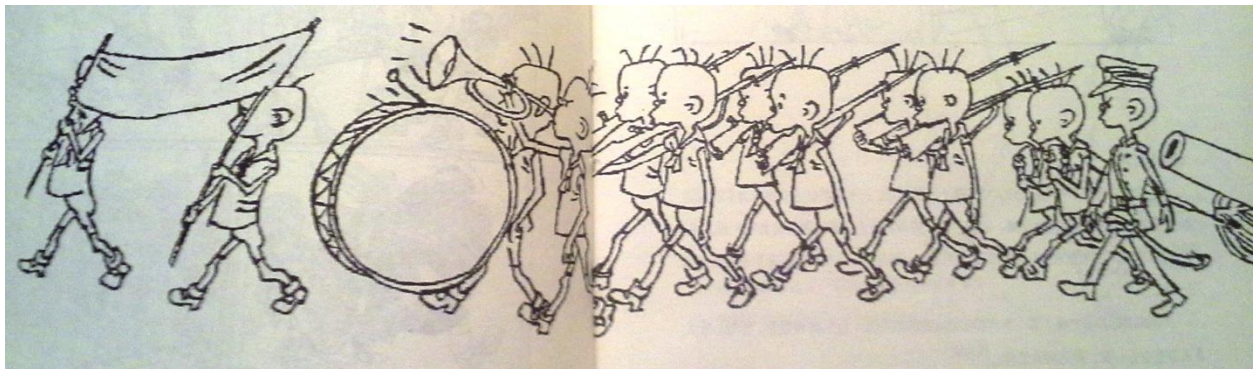


Fig. 7: Zhang Leping. Sanmao goes to War, 1937.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ding Yanzhao and Yu Zhi, *Shanghai Memory*, 36-37.



Fig. 8: Ye Qianyu. 'Abandon civilian life, join the Army!' (*Qiwen jiuwu*, 棄文就武). Originary from *Xin dongxiang*, 30 June 1939.<sup>54</sup>

Sanmao appeared also in several strips in *Resistance Cartoons*, but their content was adjusted to the general tone of the magazine. In these wartime strips, Sanmao appeared as an example for children and adults, while his naughty behaviour disappeared almost completely. For instance, in the strip 'Sanmao's Father' (*Sanmao de baba*, 三毛的爸爸) published in the third issue of *Resistance Cartoons* in 1938, the child reveals the trick his father devised in order to escape conscription. In this strip, the child discovers that his father has disguised himself as a woman in order to avoid recruitment; appalled by his dad's cowardice, the little hero unmasks him in front of the authorities (Fig. 9). 'Sanmao's Father' is interesting for several reasons. For instance, it shows Sanmao has ceased to be a naughty child becoming instead a well-behaved citizen, ready to denounce his father for the good of his country. I will come back later to this concept; here I would concentrate on the humoristic feature of this strip. The father's attempt to disguise himself as a woman and his reaction to Sanmao's betrayal were not devoid of comic power, showing how humour remained a valid mode of communication even during the war. 'Sanmao's Father' is actually a good example of how humour was used order to ridicule deserters, collaborators and citizens not willing to join the war effort.

<sup>54</sup> Rea, "History of Laughter," 249.

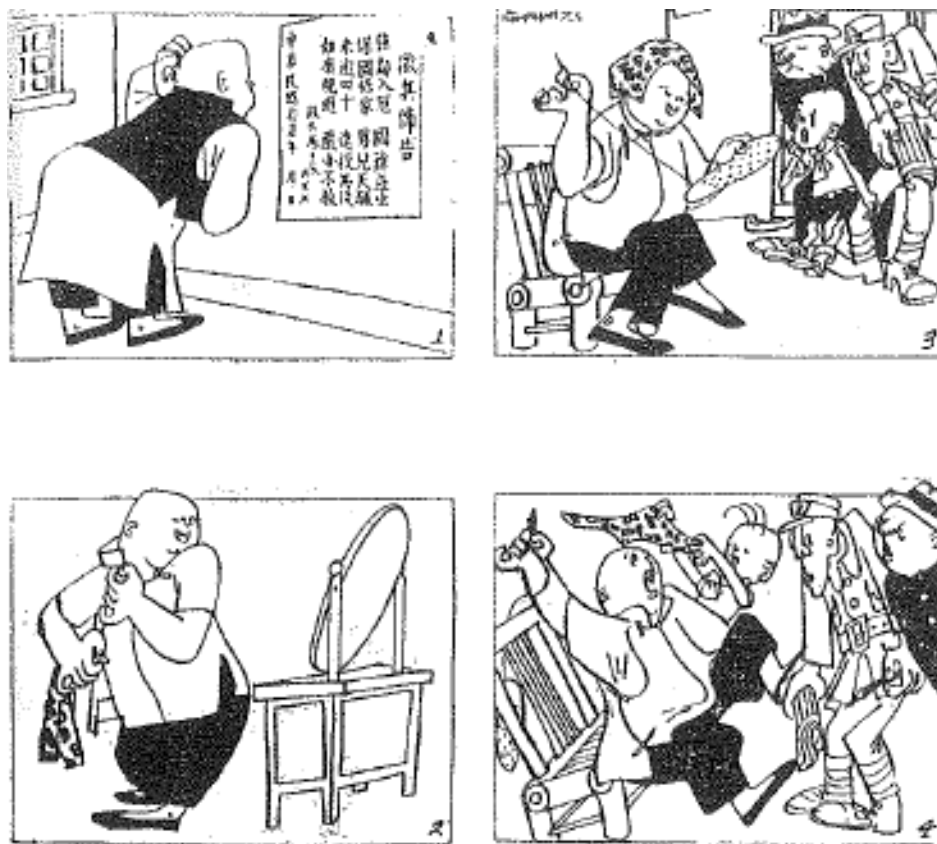


Fig. 9: Zhang Leping. 'San Mao's Father' (*Sanmao de baba*, 三毛的爸爸), *Resistance Cartoons*, 1938<sup>55</sup>

Zhang Leping was not the only cartoonist to use humour in order to denounce people's shortcomings. *Resistance Cartoons* also published Ye Qianyu's strips featuring Mr. Wang's friend Little Chen, while cartoonist Cheng Haoxiong's 陳浩雄 produced comic strips ironically entitled 'A couple of "Heroes"' (*Yidui yingxiong*, 一對英雄).<sup>56</sup> In contrast to the one panel style cartoons, the protagonists of these comics were not positive characters, but anti-heroes. Little Chen was portrayed as a corrupt businessman trying to avoid all the difficulties of war; while the behaviour of two soldier protagonists of 'A Couple of "Heroes"' could hardly be defined as 'heroic'.

<sup>55</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 23.

<sup>56</sup> An analysis of the development and content of Ye Qianyu's comics dedicated to *Little Chen* can be found in Rea, "A History of Laughter," 240-248. Examples of wartime stripes of *Little Chen* can be found in Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 131.

Similarly, in 1939 Zhang Leping published in the monthly magazine *Knife and Brush* (*Dao yu bi*, 刀與筆) later republished in *Frontline Daily* the serial comic strips *Biography of a Bastard* (*Wangba biezhuang*, 王八別傳), in which he described the life of a Chinese traitor collaborating with the Japanese.<sup>57</sup> *Biography of a Bastard* was composed of comic strips of four panels each. The story of the 'Bastard' was quite humoristic. For instance, in one strip the 'Bastard' arrests a doctor guilty of selling plasters resembling the Japanese flag. He takes the man to a Japanese official, who is actually wearing some of the incriminating plasters. It appears that the Chinese traitor has arrested the general's doctor, and he is therefore punished with fifty whacks on his behind. In the last panel, a nurse applies the Japanese plasters on the bruised buttock (Fig.11). In this strip, Zhang Leping managed to make fun of both of the Chinese traitor and the Japanese: on one side, the main character does not succeed in his attempt to please the invaders; on the other, the cartoonist does not miss the opportunity to desecrate the Japanese flag.

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<sup>57</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 91-97.



Fig. 11: Zhang Leping. From *Biography of a Bastard* (*Wangba biezhuan*, 王八別傳), 1939. 1- Damn it! These plasters dare to resemble the national flag of the 'Kingdom of Heaven', I have to intervene! (*Ma de! Gaoyao shiyang jinggan fangyong 'Tianguo' 'guoji, gai ban!* 媽的！膏藥式樣竟敢仿用天國國旗，該辦！) 2- Bastard! He is my favorite doctor! (*Hundan! Ta shi wo de enyi!* ,渾蛋他是我的恩醫) 3- Fifty heavy whacks as a punishment! (*Zhongda wushi jingjie yihou!*,重打五十警戒以後!).<sup>58</sup>

These strips were perhaps more satirical than humoristic, since they aimed at criticizing their main protagonists. Certainly, if analyzed in the context of contemporary propagandistic graphic production, these strips stand out, since they did not follow the rules of successful propagandistic communication: accessibility for illiterates (they often contained long dialogues) and straightforwardness (the message could have been misunderstood). Although these strips did not fit the resistance ideal of propaganda graphics, to ridicule those who did not support the war effort was just another method for spreading the message of resistance to a perhaps more educated public.

<sup>58</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 94.

Besides cartoons and comics, *lianhuanhua* were also part of the cartoonists' repertoire, and they also had deserters and traitors as main protagonists. In this field Zhang Leping was particularly prolific. Between 1939 and 1940 he published several serialized graphic stories in *Frontline Daily*. For instance, in *An Overture to the War of Resistance* (*Kangzhan xuqu*, 抗戰序曲), Chinese peasants decide to fight against the Japanese. The same theme is presented also in *Afu Joins the Army* (*Afu congjun ji*, 阿福從軍記), in which, however, the artist decided to analyze the situation from a different perspective. Afu is lazy man from Pudong 浦東 who at the beginning of the war rejects the idea of participating in the war effort. He refuses to donate money in order to help the army, since he thinks that even if the enemy wins, with his savings he can still start a new life outside China. He moves to the nearby Shanghai with his wife and sons, but once there, his family is killed by Japanese soldiers, who also steal his money. Afu is then obliged to help the Japanese, but he finally manages to kill one of his jailors and to escape. He witnesses the destruction caused by the enemies in Shanghai and Suzhou, and outraged by the suffering of his people, he finally decides to become a soldier (Fig. 10). *Afu Joins the Army* was published serially in *Frontline Daily*; each panel was followed by a short chapter explaining the content of the story. Zhang Leping decided to portray Afu's adventures in a realistic fashion, depicting scenes of violence and poverty in a graphic manner.



Fig. 10: Zhang Leping. The final scene of the *lianhuanhua* *Afu Joins the Army* (*Afu congjun ji*, 阿福從軍記), *Frontline Daily*, 1939.<sup>59</sup>

In both *Afu Joins the Army* and *Biography of a Bastard* Zhang portrayed cowards and traitors, describing their mediocre and sinful lives. However, if the peasant Afu was able to redeem himself understanding the importance of a national fight; traitors like 'Bastard' were irretrievable and totally indefensible. As in the case of 'Sanmao's Father', Zhang Leping employed humour in order to criticize and vilify China's enemies, while privileging dramatic scenes in the description of normal people's life.

In conclusion, during the war the production of Zhang Leping – as well as that of several other cartoonists – was not limited his production to single panel cartoons, but was much more varied. Although less widespread than cartoons, humoristic comic strips and *lianhuanhua* continued to be an important means of communication for the propagandists. Although these images presented a homogeneous content, how the message was communicated was not always as straightforward. If, as pointed out by Hung, the war had the effect of adjusting urban forms of popular culture to the needs of a more rural public, it also started a process of politicization of the above-mentioned graphic forms. Therefore, the employment of urban popular culture for propaganda purposes had also the effect of changing the way in which the urban public read

<sup>59</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 83.



comic strips and *lianhuanhua*, which from pure entertainment products became means for the diffusion of political ideas.

### **CHINESE CHILDREN RISE UP!: REPRESENTATIONS OF CHILDREN DURING THE WAR OF RESISTANCE**

As we have seen, Zhang Leping did not stop drawing his Sanmao strips. Actually the little hero was not the only child to appear in the artist's wartime cartoons. From the very beginning of his career, Zhang Leping demonstrated a specific awareness of the subject of childhood. The success of his Sanmao comics proved not only his talent in drawing children and their world, but also demonstrated the public's interest in the youngest members of Chinese society. Although the war drastically changed the aims and content of Zhang Leping's artistic production, children remained one of the main subjects of his work. The artist's wartime images differed greatly from his previous works in order to adjust to the new public and aims; indeed, his representations of children also changed accordingly, moving towards the grim tones typical of contemporary figurative art production. Since Zhang Leping was just one of several cartoonists drawing children during the war, his work should be analyzed taking into consideration the general tendency to employ images of children for propaganda purposes. What was the function of children in the propaganda campaign? In this section, I analyze some of the most widespread representations of children in wartime propaganda, showing how the cartoonist's images of China's younger citizens changed dramatically from the pre-war years.

During the Second World War, children became both subjects and recipients of wartime propagandistic material in China, as well as in Europe, the Soviet Union and the United States. While the content, aims and effects of propaganda *about* children and *for* children in western countries during the First and Second World War received the attention of several scholars, the case of China has not been researched yet. Most of the studies about propaganda and children during the war have focused on differing but interconnected issues: how children were employed in order to rally the adult population against the enemy; how propaganda targeted children; and finally how children reacted to these propagandistic messages. These categories are also useful in order to better understand also Zhang Leping's representations of childhood in the wartime.

In her article 'Children, Ideology and Iconography', Karen Dubinsky claims that the central role of children in political iconography can be considered as a global phenomenon.<sup>60</sup> According to James Kincaid, the tendency to insert references to children in political speeches or in political campaigns can be connected with the myth of childhood innocence. Since innocence empties the child of its own political agency, children can fulfil different symbolic demands. Adults presume that children exist outside the political, and they are ready to engage in political actions in order to protect children's innocence.<sup>61</sup> For this reason, political discussions often focus on the responsibility of a nation to its children. Since adults are receptive to the idea of defending their offspring, they are more likely to participate in political activities in order to protect them.<sup>62</sup> For instance, as well described by French historian Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, children occupied a central position in the propaganda discourse in France during the Great War, when posters portraying children were employed in order to mobilize the population against the enemies.<sup>63</sup> Also in Soviet Union, the government made children significant actors in wartime propaganda.<sup>64</sup> In Great Britain, parents were invited to evacuate their children sending them to the countryside, an area less likely to be targeted by German's bombs.<sup>65</sup> Most of the time, children were presented as potential victims, who adults had the obligation to protect by fighting for their country.

Besides being employed to rally adults against the enemy, children also became the targets of wartime propaganda campaigns. Young French citizens were initiated through school texts and specialized literature into a culture of war. Similarly in the United States, children became the objects and protagonists of a massive propaganda campaign which aimed at militarization of the youngest members of American society.<sup>66</sup> In the Soviet Union children who took active part in the war effort by helping to collect money for the military or even immolating themselves for

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<sup>60</sup> Karen Dubinsky, "Children, Ideology and Iconography: How Babies Rule the World," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, Vol. 5, No. 1(Winter 2012): 5-13.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Jenkins, *The Children's Culture Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1-4.

<sup>62</sup> Sharon Stephens, "Editorial Introduction: Children and Nationalism," *Childhood*, Vol.4, No.1, (1997): 5-17.

<sup>63</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants, 1914-1918: Essai d'Histoire Culturelle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993).

<sup>64</sup> Kelly, *Children's World*, 115.

<sup>65</sup> See for instance Ruth Inglis, *The Children's' War: Evacuation 1939-1945*. (London: Collins, 1989).

<sup>66</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants*; Ross F Collins, *Children, War and Propaganda* (New York: Peter Lang., 2011).

their country were celebrated.<sup>67</sup> Some recent also studies describe how children responded to wartime propaganda, showing how propagandistic messages were one of the factors which pushed underage young people to join the army and fight for their country.<sup>68</sup>

The history of Chinese children during the War of Resistance is still under-researched. Recently, Colette Plum has studied the situation of orphans in government run institutions, while Lilly Chen has explored the problem of children's criminalization.<sup>69</sup> As for propaganda, collections of wartime children's dramas, songs and novels are available, but they have not being systematized and analyzed as historical sources. Farquhar has provided a brief overview of the production of children's literature during the war, showing how Chinese children's literature was mobilized as part of the propaganda war effort. For instance, in 1939 a group of teachers established the Juvenile Publishing House (*Shaonian chubanshe*, 少年出版社) in Shanghai with the precise purpose of mobilizing children in the war effort. The result was the publication of pamphlets such as the magazine entitled *The Good Child* (*Hao Haizi*, 好孩子), renamed later *Reading for Children* (*Ertong Duwu*, 兒童讀物).<sup>70</sup> Tales narrating stories of children's heroic deeds became very popular.<sup>71</sup> However, according to Farquhar during the war the production of children's literature was sparce. There were two main reasons: first, the scarcity of paper and the interruption of the distribution network made the circulation of books and magazines very problematic; secondly, during the war the emphasis on popularization blurred the lines between children and adult literature. This meant that different means of communication, for instance cartoons, were considered more appropriate than literature for the education of both adults and children.<sup>72</sup>

Children often appeared in propaganda cartoons. The aim of these images was twofold: on the one hand, the call for the protection of young Chinese citizens, connected with the nationalistic

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<sup>67</sup> Kelly, *Children's World*, 117.

<sup>68</sup> See between others Olga Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers: How Soviet Children went to War, 1941-1945* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

<sup>69</sup> Colette Plum, "Orphans in the Family," 186-206.

<sup>70</sup> Farquhar, *Chinese Children's Literature*, 169-170.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 183

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170.

view of Chinese children as 'future masters of the nation' made of childhood a crucial issue in rallying the population against the Japanese. On the other hand, propaganda cartoons directly tried to involve young citizens in the war activities. How do we know that children were targeted by cartoonists? Although propaganda images were aimed at a heterogeneous group of readers, it is possible to see how some cartoons targeted children as their main public. In April 1938, the wartime magazine *Resistance Cartoons* dedicated several articles and cartoons to the annual celebration of National Children's Day.<sup>73</sup> On this occasion, cartoonist Liao Bingxiong published in this magazine a short text entitled 'Chinese Children Rise up!' (*Zhongguo haizi qilai le!*, 中國孩子起來了!):

Who killed your parents? Who killed your sisters? Who pierced our brothers with a bayonet? Who seized our lands and properties? We should go and fight against them! Old people, middle aged people, young people, it's time to rise up! You little masters of the New China, rise up! 'Sing on the street corners, put a play on the stage, transport the wounded from the battlefield, display posters on whitewashed walls. In every piece of land of China, in every corner, our Future Masters [Chinese children] were thought to hate, they grew up under the artillery fire! (...) There is no laughter on Children's Day this year, but there are also no tears, since we have to take revenge! You have to fight! Open your mouths, raise your fists, you can pick up a pen, every child should record the behaviour of criminals, so that everybody can see, children should teach everybody that we should fight together!'<sup>74</sup>

Liao Bingxiong's text introduced themes which also appeared in the cartoons published on the magazine: children's suffering; their role as future leaders of the Chinese nation and the necessity to mobilize them for the war. In particular, in underlining Japanese soldiers' brutality, the cartoonist invited children to revenge their parents by actively participating in the war effort. This piece spoke directly to younger readers, presenting the cruelty of the enemy and inviting children to become active members of the resistance. During the war schools, orphanages and

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<sup>73</sup> National Children day, from Gerth, *China Made*, 323-324.

<sup>74</sup> Liao Bingxiong. "Zhongguo haizi qilai le!" 中國孩子起來了! [Chinese Children Rise Up!]. *Kangzhan Manhua*, April 1938. Reprinted in Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 2005.

boy scouts organizations organized public events – such as drama representations, parades and fund raising – during which children could make their contribution to their country.<sup>75</sup> Cartoonists tried to boost these activities portraying children actively participating in the war effort. Children could see propaganda cartoons on city walls and in exhibitions. Contemporary pictures depicted children attentively listening to adults explaining to them the content of cartoons exhibited in the street (Fig. 12).

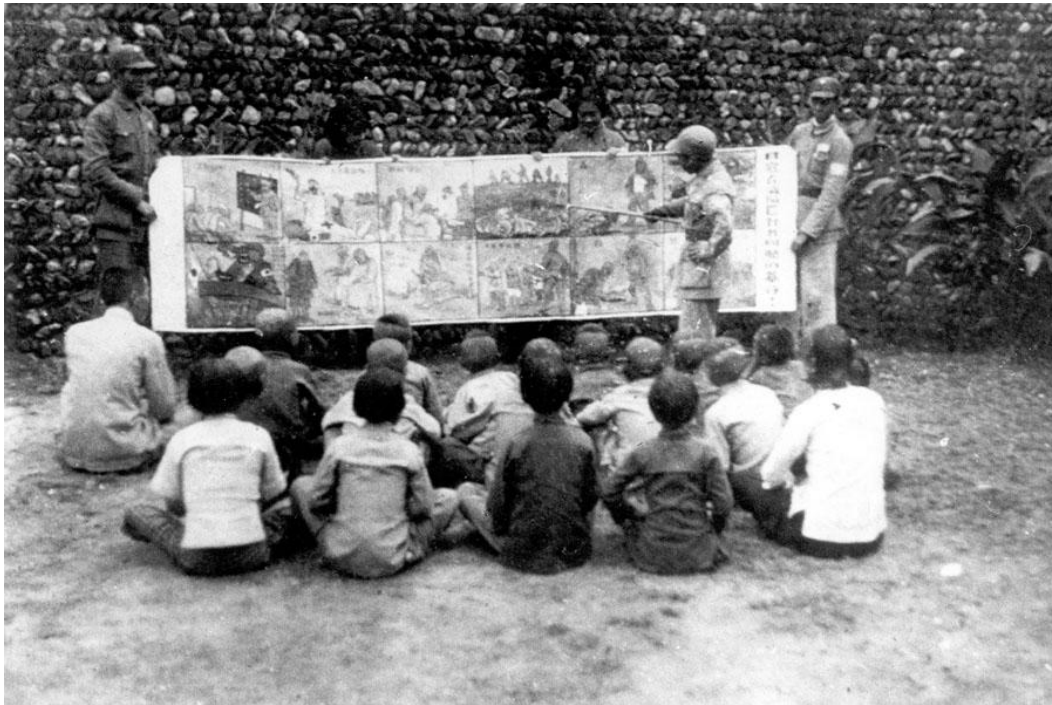


Fig. 12: Explaining a cartoon to children.<sup>76</sup>

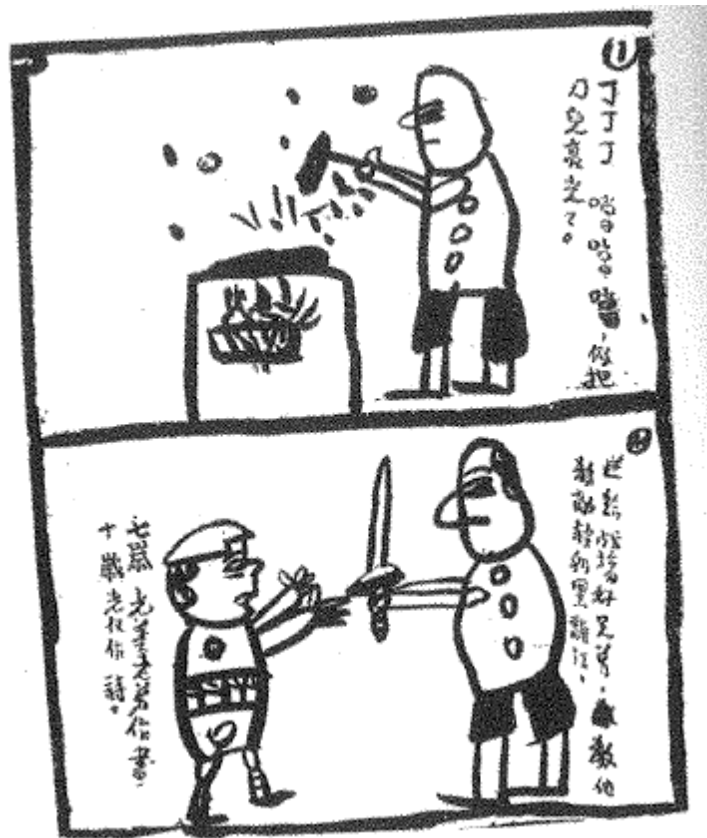
Interestingly, the Children Day's edition of *Resistance Cartoons* also published a few cartoons sent to the magazine by real children, which proved that the young readers were deeply influenced by the contemporary patriotic rhetoric.<sup>77</sup> A perfect example is 'Forging a Broadsword' (*Da dadao*, 打大刀), a cartoon drawn by seven-year-old Yu Guangmei 余光美, where a man forge a broadsword for a younger member of the family in order to teach him how to fight against the enemy. The child, dressed as a boy scout, accepts the sword, ready to fight (Fig. 13). While Yu Guanmei drew the cartoon, his eleven-year-old brother wrote the characters by the

<sup>75</sup> Children's activities were often documented by newspapers and magazines such as *The Young Companion*. In the following pages I will present and discuss some of these sources.

<sup>76</sup> From Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 101.

<sup>77</sup> Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 223-224.

side of the picture. We cannot know if little Yu Guangmei drew this cartoon by himself or if he was actually asked to produce this image by his parents or teachers. This is not proof that children autonomously engaged in propaganda, but it shows how they were made conscious of the content and meaning of contemporary cartoons. The young author of this cartoon was familiar with several motifs – such as the broadsword and the boy scouts – that, as we will see, were extremely popular in wartime cartoons. Certainly, this image proved that the rhetoric of patriotism had entered children's everyday life.



work of cartoonists, showing readers some of the cartoons. One of the most powerful images presented in the article was a depiction of a group of helpless Chinese babies with bound wrists attacked by a pair of scrawny bloody hands (Fig. 14). As pointed out by the caption written on the side of the image, this cartoon referred to a real event. According to the author, the hands of a number of Chinese children were bound with iron wire by the Japanese in the area of Jiujiang 九江 and Hukou 湖口, in Jiangxi province. The gravity of this action was underlined by the Japanese hands dripping blood on the frightened children from above. The author of this cartoon knew well how to catch the attention of the public with strong images. From the pictures published in *The Young Companion*, we can see that this cartoon was hung or painted on a wall, most probably on a street, visible to everybody irrespective of age.



Fig. 14: One of the photographs of propaganda murals published in the article "Kangzhan bihua" 抗戰壁畫 [Resistance Murals], *The Young Companion*, February 1939, Issue 139. The caption reads: 'The Japanese robbers are inhuman and brutal, in Jiujiang and Wukou area they bound with iron wire the hands of our little brothers and sisters. I hope that we will be revenged soon.'

The cartoon sent by seven-year-old Yu Guangmen and the image reproduced in *The Young Companion* are perfect examples of two widespread representations of children during the war:

they were either potential fighters or innocent victims. This dichotomy entered the work of several cartoonists, among them Feng Zikai, who during the war abandoned his sophisticated interpretation of children's innocence, representing childhood for propagandistic aims. In his cartoons children become either victims or examples for the population. In 'A mother's head severed', the artist showed how the brutal death of a mother influenced the life of the toddler she is breastfeeding; while in 'National Salvation Fund', a group of children are represented while they accomplish their duty of good citizens donating their money for the nation (Fig. 15 and 16).<sup>79</sup>



Fig. 15:

Feng Zikai: A mother's head severed. From China Weekly Review, 8 April 1939.<sup>80</sup>

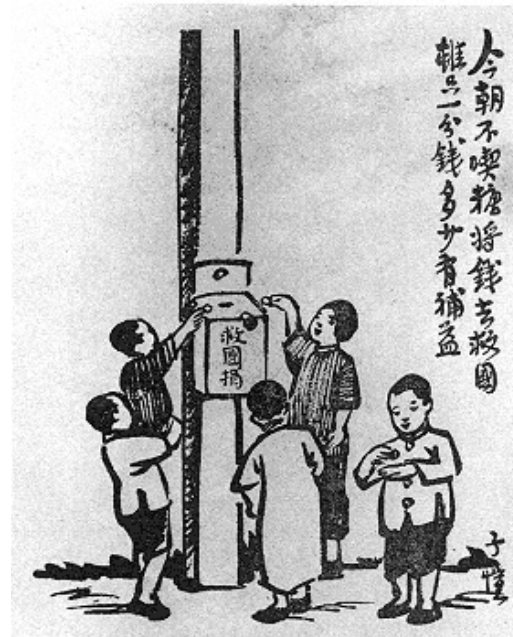


Fig.16: Feng Zikai: "Today I am not going to have any candy, / The money will be donated to our government. / Although it is a small sum, / Every bit will certainly help." The collection box is labeled "National Salvation Fund."<sup>81</sup>

Children as victims and activists were the most recurrent motifs reproduced by cartoonists. In this case, Zhang Leping was not an exception. During the war, the artist produced several cartoons of children killed by brutal Japanese soldiers, as well as child-heroes fighting against

<sup>79</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 137-150.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 142.



the enemy. What were the aims of these images? An analysis of Zhang Leping's cartoons reveals important elements for understanding the political relevance of children in wartime propaganda.

### **Children as Victims**

Chinese children suffered incredibly during the war for different reasons: they were often obliged to flee their homes, they suffered hunger, disease and brutality. In the worst cases they were left orphans or they were killed. Cartoonists endorsed one specific representation of children's suffering: their violent death at the hands of Japanese soldiers. Certainly murders against children occurred during the war, but cartoons denouncing horrific Japanese deeds against young victims should not be read as a representation of historical reality, but should be understood in the light of the nationalistic wartime discourse. The act of killing children not only served as a reminder of the brutality of Japanese soldiers, who through this act were deprived them of their humanity; but, since from the establishment of the Republic children had become the symbol of China's future, to massacre them meant also to put an end the history and development of the Chinese nation.

As many other cartoonists, Zhang Leping often depicted infanticides in his cartoons. One of the most emblematic representations of Japanese brutality against Chinese children was Zhang Leping's 'Ah! A Chinese Child!' (*Ah! Zhongguo haizi!* 啊! 中國孩子). In it, two Japanese soldiers find a baby among the ruins of a house. One of them throws the little naked body on the bayonet of his friend, as if it were garbage. The title of the cartoon adds dramatic emphasis to the already powerful scene. Not only do the two Japanese soldiers do not show any sign of compassion toward the innocent toddler, but they seem to kill him for pure pleasure (Fig. 17).<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, in choosing the title 'Ah! A Chinese Child!' the author underlined the importance of nationality in the rhetoric of war. In this cartoon, Zhang Leping not only stressed the brutality of the enemy, but also its will to destroy the Chinese nation through the elimination of its children. Significantly, 'Ah! A Chinese child!' was one of the fortyfive Chinese cartoons to be exhibited at the Soviet Union Exhibition organized in Moscow in June 1938.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Significantly, 'Ah! A Chinese child!' was one of the forty-five Chinese cartoons exposed at the Soviet Union Exhibition organized in Moscow in June 1938 .Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi Ye Cong Junji* , 31.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 31.



Fig. 17: Zhang Leping. 'Ah! A Chinese child!' (Ah! *Zhongguo haizi!* 啊! 中国孩子). April, 1938.<sup>84</sup>

The motif of Chinese children pierced by Japanese bayonets was recurrent in Zhang Leping's production as well as in the works of his colleagues.<sup>85</sup> In 1939, Zhang Leping drew a cartoon entitled 'This is how the enemy murders us!' (*Diren shi zheyang shahai women de!* 敵人是這樣殺害我們的!), where the corpses of three babies hang from the spear of a cruel Japanese soldier. In order to underline the brutality of this murder, Zhang Leping deliberately depicted the face of the Japanese soldier with animalistic features – such as big teeth and mouth. The soldier beastly look stands in contrast with the little bodies of the Chinese children. Also in this case, the title strengthened the meaning of the image: by slaughtering Chinese babies, the Japanese destroy the future of the Chinese nation. Certainly, portraying the savage massacre of children served as an attempt to awaken Chinese citizens' spirit of resistance. Resisters were summoned to revenge children, ensuring at the same time the salvation of the entire country (Fig. 18).

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.sanmao.com.cn/father/antiwar/manhua.html>

<sup>85</sup> Cartoonists Te Wei, Ye Qianyu and many others portrayed children killed with bayonets by Japanese soldiers.



Fig. 18: Zhang Leping. 'This is how the enemy murders us! ' (*Diren shi zheyang shahai women de!*  
敵人是這樣殺害我們的!), 1939.<sup>86</sup>

Children were often represented with their mothers, as we have seen in the case of Feng Zikai. He was not the only artist to elaborate this theme: Cai Ruohong, Ye Qianyu, and many others depicted Chinese mothers and their infants overcome by the atrocities of war.<sup>87</sup> In this case also, Zhang Leping did not hesitate to follow the example of his colleagues, producing a number of cartoons having as protagonists the mother-child relationship. For instance, one of the artist's cartoons dealing with this subject was 'Japanese invaders' Cheating Methods' (*Rikou de Qipian Shouduan*, 日寇的欺騙手段), published in *Resistance Cartoons* (Fig. 19).<sup>88</sup> The scene is composed of two panels. In the first one, we see a mother with two children fleeing their house in order to avoid the Japanese bombing. Unfortunately, in the second panel we discover that they did not survive. The dreadful scene becomes even more shocking when we read the content of

<sup>86</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 110.

<sup>87</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 102-106.

<sup>88</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 25-26.

the airborne leaflets<sup>89</sup> dropped by the Japanese airplanes, which say: 'Japanese airplanes do not kill Chinese People' (*Riben feiji busha zhongguo renmin*, 日本飛機不殺中國人民). Zhang Leping's aim was to disclose to the public the Japanese soldiers' evil, which not only committing despicable crimes, but also lying about their actions.



Fig. 19: 'Japanese invaders' Cheating Methods' (*Rikou de qipian shouduan*, 日寇的欺騙手段). From *Resistance Cartoons*, 1938. In the second panel, we can read on the airborne leaflet dropped by the Japanese: 'Japanese airplanes do not kill Chinese People' (*Riben feiji busha zhongguo renmin*, 日本飛機不殺中國人民).<sup>90</sup>

These cartoons portraying enemy violence against children aimed to rouse observers' patriotic sentiments. A common feature of all these cartoons is the age of the children represented: toddlers, physically unable to defend themselves or to help adults in defending the country. Children witnesses could not recognize themselves in these helpless infants. Cartoons representing children as victims targeted adults, encouraging them to protect Chinese younger citizens by fighting against the enemy. But children were also asked to actively participate in the war effort as resistance fighters.

<sup>89</sup> The use of airborne leaflets was widespread propaganda method during the war.

<sup>90</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 26.

## Children as Activists

Children as victims of the Japanese were not the only wartime representation of childhood employed by Chinese propagandists. The wartime iconography of childhood included also the representation of children as resisters helping their adult countrymen in war activities. Zhang Leping included these two representations in his work, particularly in the few *Sanmao* strips which he produced during the war.

Chinese children were mobilized during the War of Resistance. The war altered expectations of children, who, during the war, were often considered as little adults with responsibilities towards the state.<sup>91</sup> For instance, *The Young Companion* published several articles about the preparation of children for the war, especially boy scouts. In February 1939, this magazine published a report entitled 'Children in Eastern Zhejiang on the War Path', which explained how children between the ages of eight and twelve in Eastern Zhejiang were trained in order to be ready to join the veteran division.<sup>92</sup> The text was followed by several pictures of children in military uniforms training in different fighting techniques. One of these pictures represented young boy scouts training with broadswords (Fig.20). Most probably these children were never sent to the battlefield. The aim of these pictures was to show to adults how even children were determined to fight for their country. During the war, children fighters and activists were elevated as role-models for other children or adults. Boy scouts were perhaps the most popular visual icons of this tendency. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the 1930s the Nationalist Party elevated boy scouts to model-children, often celebrated in popular culture. The behaviour, physical vigour and military preparation of boy scouts were supposed to reflect the strength of the Chinese nation. It was also for this reason that during the war, pictures of boy scouts' parades, military training and collecting funds activities became even more popular. For instance, in March 1939, *The Young Companion* published a photographic reportage completely dedicated to the celebrations for the Boy Scouts' Day in Chongqing and Chengdu, showing well-behaved children marching in military fashion (Fig. 21).

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<sup>91</sup> Colette Plum, "Lost Childhoods in a New China: Child-Citizens-Workers at War 1935-1947," *European Journal of East Asian Studies*. Vol.11, No.2, (2012): 237-258.

<sup>92</sup> Ding Xunlian 丁訓練, "Zhedong zhi tongding xunlian" 浙東之童丁訓練 [Children in Eastern Zhejiang on the War Path], *The Young Companion*, February 1939, Issue 139.



Fig. 20: Young boys and girls units training with broadswords in "Zhedong zhi tongding xunlian" 浙東之童丁訓練  
[Children training in Western Zhejiang ], *The Young Companion*, February 1939.



Fig. 21: Celebration for the Boy Scouts' Day in Chengdu, in "San yue shiwu ri tongjun jie" 三月十五日童軍節  
[Celebration for the Boy Scouts' Day on 15 March ], *The Young Companion* , May 1939.

*Resistance Cartoons* followed this tendency publishing cartoons presenting boy scouts as exemplary models for children and adults. They were mostly portrayed while collecting money for soldiers, cultivating land, helping adults in the propaganda efforts and participating in official parades.<sup>93</sup> In May 1938, in a section of the magazine titled 'We have to take care of the next generation of soldiers!' (*Baoyu women xiayidai de zhanshi*, 保育我們下一代的戰士), cartoonists showed different images of model children, helping adults in the war effort.<sup>94</sup> For instance, in 'Do not say that children are too young' (*Wu shuo haizi nianji shao*, 勿說孩子年紀少) Liao Bingxiong showed scouts delivering letters despite the bombing and giving speeches in the street to an audience of adults. Boy scouts appear resolute, fearless and able to lead the crowd (Fig. 22). This kind of image aimed to set an example for both young and grown-up readers. Adults could feel inspired by the behaviour of these model children or feel ashamed because they did not set the right example for young citizens; while younger readers were motivated to emulate the children represented in these cartoons.



Fig 22: Liao Bingxiong. 'Do not say that children are too young! We don't lack any ability! Under fire we deliver letters and we make propaganda on the street corners!' (*Wu shuo haizi nianji shao*, 勿說孩子年紀少門門本領都!),

*Resistance Cartoons*, 1938.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> On the history of Boy Scouts organization and their activities during the Second World War in the United States see: Collins, *Children, War and Propaganda*, 159-207.

<sup>94</sup> Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 230.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

Child fighters and boy scouts also appeared in Zhang Leping's propaganda cartoons. In January 1938, *Resistance Cartoons* published Zhang Leping's comic strip 'Sanmao's Broadsword' (*Sanmao de dadao*, 三毛的大刀), where the popular comic hero tries to join the army despite his young age. The soldier in charge of the enrolment refuses to enlist him; however, Sanmao makes him see that his age is not that relevant. Under the eyes of the surprised soldier, the child cuts down two trees with his broadsword declaring: 'I don't believe that the Japanese Devils' necks can be harder than these trees!' (Fig. 23).<sup>96</sup> This strip contains relevant information about the reality and symbolism of children soldiers. From the most concrete perspective, it shows that children were not officially allowed to join the army. Despite Sanmao's determination and ability, the strip does not suggest that the child will eventually become a soldier. However, Zhang Leping's strip also shows how younger generations of Chinese were ready to fight for their nation, in order to guarantee a future for their country. In this respect, the broadsword adds symbolic meaning to the action. The *dadao* was a traditional Chinese sword, which was still use in combat against the Japanese when no other weapons were available. The broadsword came to symbolize Chinese culture, adding a second level of interpretation to Zhang Leping's comic strip. Representations of children skillfully handling *dadao* underlined children's role in the perpetration of Chinese heritage and race.

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<sup>96</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye cong Junji*, 22.





Fig. 23: Zhang Leping. 'San Mao's Broadsword' (*San Mao de dadao*, 三毛的大刀), *Resistance Cartoons*, 1938.<sup>97</sup>

If in 'Sanmao's Broadsword' Zhang Leping depicted his hero as a young fighter, in other strips Sanmao appeared while performing his duties as a Chinese citizen. Similarly to 'Sanmao's Father', in 'Taken by Strategy' (*Keyi zhiqu*, 可以智取), the child witnesses the upsetting behaviour of his father, who when asked by a group of scouts for a small financial donation to the soldiers on the front, refuses them any contribution. Sanmao decides to obtain his help using a different strategy. When his father goes to sleep, the child takes away from him the thick coat which he uses as a blanket, forcing the man to understand some of the inconveniences suffered daily by Chinese soldiers. Finally his father wakes up trembling with cold, and that point Sanmao shows him the same poster displayed before by the scouts, asking his father to be more understanding towards the suffering of his fellow countrymen (Fig. 24)

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 22.

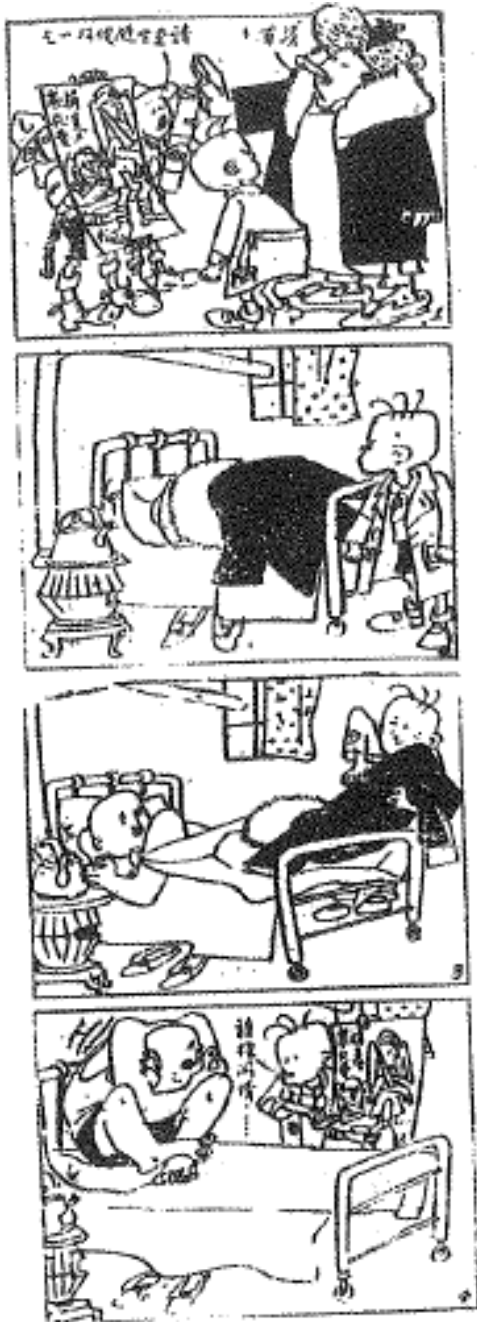


Fig. 24: Zhang Leping. 'Taken by Strategy' (*Keyi zhiqu*, 可以智取), *Resistance Cartoons*, 1938<sup>98</sup>

Similarly to Liao Bingxiong's cartoon about boy scouts, Sanmao's strip presents the little hero as a model citizen, whose exemplary actions should be followed both by adults and children. Sanmao's adventures reminded adults of their misbehaviors, providing at the same time his older and younger readers with a model to follow. These images were therefore both symbolic and educational. On one side, representing children as resisters, cartoonists tried to communicate a

<sup>98</sup> Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 192.

sense of continuity in national history, expressing hope for a bright future; on the other, they invited Chinese citizens to reflect on their behaviour, denouncing the most widespread misconduct of the population. These cartoons turned the classical adult-child relation where the old teaches the young upside down. In transforming children into model citizens scolding parents for their misbehaviour, Zhang Leping subverted the Confucian concept of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) according to which children were supposed to take care of their parents at all costs, and to accept their teaching.<sup>99</sup> Teaching his father how to behave, Sanmao subverts this rule, showing how the new generations could save China from imperialistic forces.

## THE EMERGENCE OF ORPHANS IN WARTIME PROPAGANDA CARTOONS

There is another category of child which became a very popular subject in the war years: the orphan. It is estimated that between twenty and thirty million Chinese died during the Sino-Japanese conflict for war-related reasons.<sup>100</sup> The death of so many people led to the creation of various other social problems, among which orphans were one of the most crucial. According to statistics, during the war at least two million children became orphans in China, prompting the Nationalist government and the China National Relief Commission to build and subsidize children's homes all over the country.<sup>101</sup> The First Lady Madame Song Meiling 宋美齡 (1897-2003) was one of the key characters for the establishment of several institutions for children. As well documented by *The Young Companion*, the first lady together with her two sisters Song Qingling 宋慶齡 (1890-1981) and Song Ailing 宋藹齡 (1888-1973), travelled around China visiting institutions and hospitals for refugees and orphans.<sup>102</sup> It is estimated that at least 220.000 children found help in one of the institutions established by the National Relief Commission. The First Lady's awareness of the problems of orphans was connected both with the unquestionable necessity to provide help for these wretched children and with the important role played by orphans in the war propaganda campaign. Colette Plum pointed out that 'both the Nationalist and

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<sup>99</sup> Mo Weiming and Shen Wenjun, "The Twenty-Four Paragons of Filial Piety: their Didactic Role and Impact on Children," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol.24, No.1 (Spring 1999):15-23.

<sup>100</sup> Diana Lary and Stephen R. McKinnon, *Scars of War: The impact of Warfare in Modern China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>101</sup> Plum, "Orphans in the Family," 188.

<sup>102</sup> Nicole Elizabeth Barnes, "Who will take care of the Orphans?' Women's contributions during China's War against Japan. (1937-1945)." *Thinking Gender Papers*, UCLA Center for the Study of Women, UC Los Angeles, February 6, 2009.

the Communist party saw in the 'war orphan' a potent cultural symbol infused with national ideology'.<sup>103</sup>

Orphans became central characters in the propaganda campaign for two main reasons: on one side it was necessary to sensitize public awareness on this issue; on the other by claiming to protect orphans, the Nationalists promoted the vision of the nation under state control. In order to underline the importance of saving Chinese orphans, propagandists represented them as important personalities for the future of the country, addressing them as 'children of the ancestral homeland' (*Zuguo de haizimen*, 祖國的孩子們), or the 'nation's children' (*Gujia de ertong*, 國家的兒童) instead of the most standard word *gu' er* 孤兒.<sup>104</sup> Following this tendency, also cartoonists also introduced orphans into their works. In wartime propaganda cartoons, orphans embodied the twofold representation which cartoonists reserved for children: victims and fighters. Huang Jiaying's 黃嘉音 article about the orphans of Zhengjiaci 鄭家祠 published in *Salvation Cartoons* on 5 October 1937 can be considered the written version of the iconography presented in several cartoons:

Children! You child who have encountered a miserable fate! This year you are 12-years-old. However you have just become a lonely orphan and with not even one person who can take care of you. Who would have thought this? Things happen so fast! A few weeks ago, you were a lucky child with a daddy and a mum, your older sister loved you, your older brother perhaps liked to beat you up a bit, but now you have to face the sorrow of a broken family. Remember! We, as your new welcoming family, have already exterminated the vicious artillery of our enemy. Children, you have to get revenge! For your daddy, for your sisters, for your older brothers and for your country! Children, you must remember!<sup>105</sup>

The article continues with a detailed description of the bombing of the village of Zhengjiaci. Similarly to 'Rise Chinese Children!', this editorial also points out the suffering of children who

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<sup>103</sup> Plum, "Orphans in the Family," 189

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>105</sup> Huang Jiaying's 黃嘉音, "Zhengjiaci de gu'er" 鄭家祠的孤兒 [Children of Zhengjiaci], *Jiuwang Manhua*, October 1937.

lost their loved ones. In this case, the author speaks directly to orphans, inviting them to fight actively against the Japanese in order to revenge their parents' death.

The same rhetoric was employed by Zhang Leping in his cartoons. For instance, in the twelve-panel tale 'Sanmao escapes from the enemies' bayonets' (*Cong diren qiangci xia taochu de Sanmao*, 從敵人槍刺下逃出的三毛), the artist turns his little hero into a war orphan. Sanmao's story is somehow similar to the one described in Huang Jiaying's article, where the idyllic life of children is violently interrupted by the Japanese. In the strip, the enemies brutally kill Sanmao's parents, leaving the child alone and unprotected. Sanmao is rescued by his uncle, who soon leaves him to join the army. Hungry and lonely, the little hero looks for help in a village, but the locals avoid him. Finally, Sanmao meets a group of children willing to listen to his heartbreaking story. Immediately, the children decide to start their own propaganda group, in order to convince adults to join the Chinese army and fight their enemy (Fig. 25).

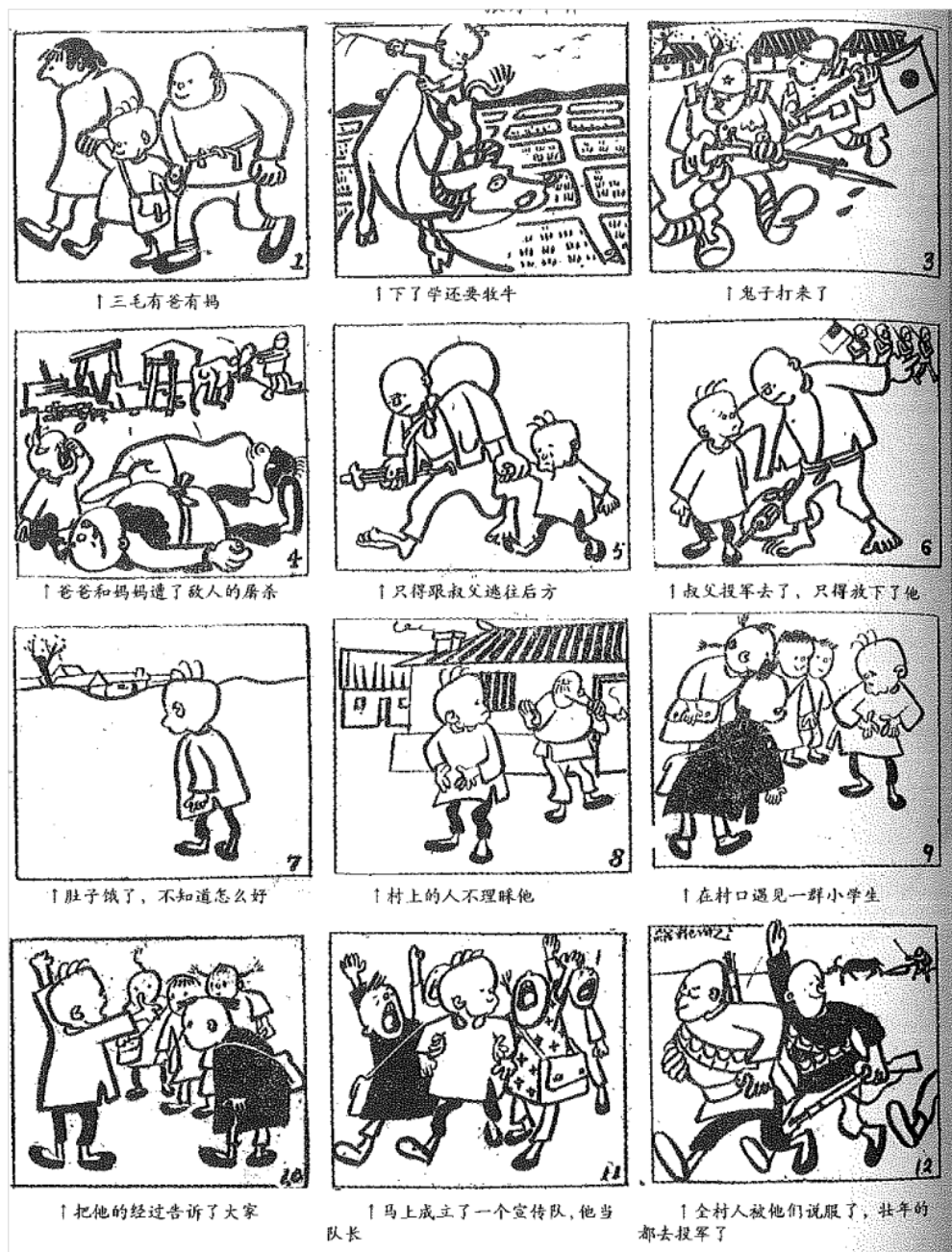


Fig. 25:Zhang Leping. 'Sanmao Escapes from the Enemies' Bayonets' (*Cong diren qiangci xia taichu de Sanmao*, 從敵人槍刺下逃出的三毛), *Resistance Cartoons*, May 1938.<sup>106</sup>

Obviously, 'Sanmao Escapes from the Enemies' Bayonets' differed greatly from Zhang Leping's typical strips in style and content. As for tone, this graphic can hardly be defined as a comic strip. The choice to add a caption below every single panel makes it resemble more the style of picture

<sup>106</sup> Shen Jianzhong, *Kangzhan Manhua*, 240.

story books than of comic strips.<sup>107</sup> Even if the general meaning of the story is comprehensible without captions, the description added to the panels not only enriches the story with details, but also removes any possible doubt about the message. Furthermore, the humoristic tones typical of the *Sanmao* strips – even the wartime ones – disappeared completely, leaving space for a fully dramatic depiction of reality.

As for contents, 'Sanmao Escapes from the Enemies' Bayonets' contains almost all the motifs connected with the figure of war orphans. The death of parents was quite a ubiquitous theme in contemporary cartoons, as well as the exemplary behaviour of Chinese children themselves. However, this strip presented other two interesting motifs: child abandonment and population's lack of concern for orphans. Plum pointed out that a number of Chinese war orphans did not lose their parents, but were abandoned or lost.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, often the population did not show any interest for these unfortunate kids.<sup>109</sup> These two social problems found a place in Zhang Leping's strip. In the sixth panel Sanmao is left alone by his uncle, who has to join the army. In this way, the artist introduced the problem of abandonment, inferring that the difficult conditions of orphans were often caused by their families' participation in the war efforts. This message appears clearer with the development of the story. For instance, when the orphan Sanmao arrives in a village, the inhabitants do not pay attention to him, leaving the poor child alone and hungry. The peasants' uncaring attitude toward Sanmao reflects their indifference towards the national war. In the end, the orphan- and his new young friends- is the only person able to rally the peasants to war despite the suffering inflicted on him by the conflict. Clearly, in depicting orphans as victims, Zhang Leping tried to sensitize the population towards this widespread problem. Furthermore, by portraying these unfortunate children as resisters, he reminded his public that also orphans are Chinese citizens too, able to sacrifice their life for their country.<sup>110</sup>

Another idea connecting Zhang Leping's work with the piece 'Orphans of Zhengjiaci ' is the theme of revenge. In the article, Huang Jiaying encourages orphans to exact vengeance on behalf

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<sup>107</sup> It is unclear if the subtitles were added by the editor of the collected volume of *Kangzhan Manhua* or they were originally inserted in the strip. Clearly, they were transcribed in *jiantizi* by the editor.

<sup>108</sup> Plum, "Orphans in the Family," 193.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

of their families, suggesting that they take the place of their parents in the fight against the enemy. Similarly, the final panels of Zhang Leping's story show the personal revenge of Sanmao, who engages in propaganda efforts persuading adults to fight against the soldiers guilty of massacring his family. In this case, revenge becomes also a symbol for the future of the Chinese Nation. Although adult citizens are killed by the Japanese, their orphan children will continue their parents' fight.

The idea that children would avenge their fathers' death by taking over their positions as soldiers was also put forward in Zhang Leping's 'Father's relics' (*Fuqin de yiwu*, 父親的遺物).<sup>111</sup> In this cartoon a child is portrayed grabbing a rifle in front of a massacred corpse. This image is very powerful. From the child's dress we can presume that he is a poor child, whose young age is made even more evident by his lack of height. However, his expression – a mix of sadness and resolution – communicates strength to the readers. In this case, the title of the cartoon is revealing: the child is standing in front of his father's body, ready to take his place in the fight and revenge his death (Fig. 26). As in the case of all the cartoons portraying the brutality of Japanese soldiers, in this image Zhang Leping privileged dramatic tones over humoristic representation, abandoning the abstract and minimalistic style of comic strips for a realistic depiction of war.

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<sup>111</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun. *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 108.



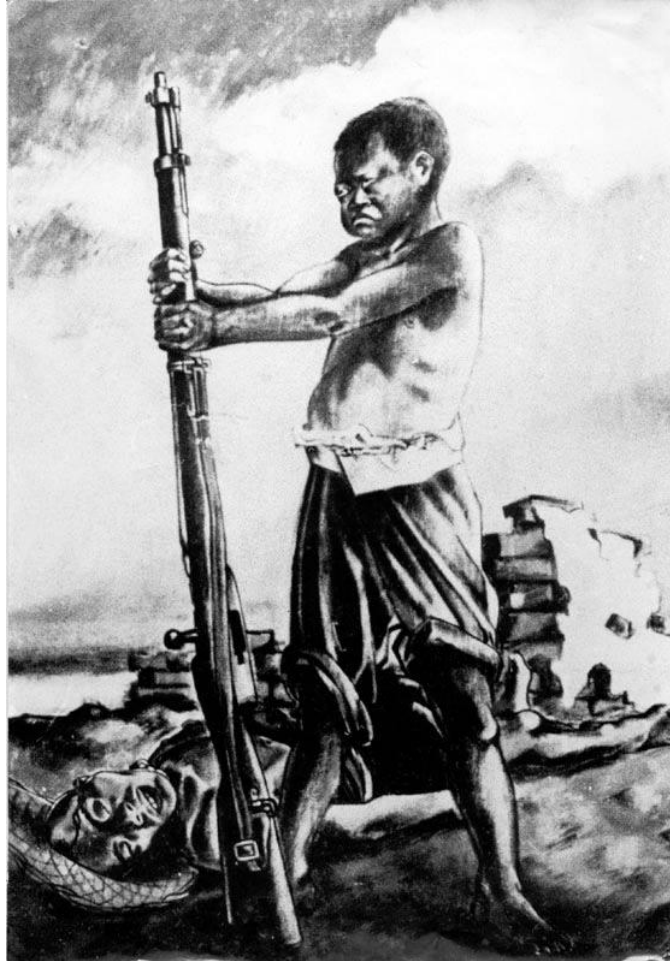


Fig. 26: Zhang Leping. 'Father's relics' (*Fuqin de yiwu*, 父親的遺物), 1939.<sup>112</sup>

Interestingly, 'Father's relics' and 'Sanmao escapes from the enemies' bayonets' are both set in the countryside. While *Sanmao* strips are normally set in an urban environment and the little hero is portrayed as a middle class child, in the case of 'Sanmao escapes from the enemies' bayonets', he lives in the countryside and he comes from a peasant family. It is in this context that he becomes an orphan. Probably, Zhang Leping based these cartoons on his own experience in the countryside; however, it is relevant to point out that while in propaganda cartoons boy scouts are always connected with urban, government-related activities, orphans are left without help in the countryside. Plum claims that during the war, orphans played an important role in the state-building process. Free from any family connection, they were brought up by the state and could

<sup>112</sup> Feng Chuying, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 7.

become children of the nation.<sup>113</sup> Propaganda cartoons both confirm and deny this perspective: the constant reference to war orphans in propaganda underlined the central role that homeless children occupied in the contemporary political discourse. However, the state never appeared in these cartoons, children had to find a way to survive by themselves. As we will see, this will become one of the main themes of Zhang Leping's comics after the end of the war.

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<sup>113</sup> Plum, "Orphans in the Family," 189.

### CHAPTER 3: REINTERPRETING THE WAR OF RESISTANCE: HUMOUR, CHILDREN AND ANTI-WAR SENTIMENT IN *SANMAO JOINS THE ARMY* (1945-1946)

While drawing *Sanmao Joins the Army*, I tried to create a story that reflected the cruelty of real life; I tried to make people shake with laughter, presenting them with a thought-provoking theme. While *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* is the most popular of my comic serials, from the artistic perspective I prefer *Sanmao Joins the Army*.<sup>1</sup>

With these words, Zhang Leping explained the main idea of *Sanmao Joins the Army* (*SJTA*), announcing at the same time his preference for this comic serial over his much more popular *The Wandering Life*, published a few years later. He also claimed that with this comic serial he aimed to explain to his readers the 'cruelty of real life' making them 'shake with laughter'. These two ideas seemed to oppose; yet Zhang Leping created a humorous representation of war which intensified the most unpleasant aspects of military life. Zhang Leping lived and worked for nine years in areas of the country devastated by war; and he had the opportunity to witness in person the life of soldiers on the battlefield and the destruction caused by Japanese bombing. At the end of 1945, he returned to Shanghai, where he resumed drawing *Sanmao* in several publications. Between 12 May and 4 November 1946, he published *SJTA* in the influential newspaper *Shenbao* 申報, in the context of simmering conflict between Nationalists and Communists.<sup>2</sup> In this serial, Zhang narrated the adventures of the little hero as a soldier during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Despite its comical content, *SJTA* reflected the politically and socially unstable situation of post-war China in relation to the propagandistic representations of war so widespread during the War of Resistance. Scholars have tended to dismiss *SJTA* as a mere entertaining comic with no political value; historians have seen it mostly as a humoristic tale.<sup>3</sup> Those who have analyzed *SJTA* more seriously interpret this comic as a denunciation of the Nationalists' corruption and ineptitude in dealing with the country's problems.<sup>4</sup> In interpreting this comic serial as a representation of the struggle between Communists and Nationalists,

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<sup>1</sup>Zhang Leping speaking about *Sanmao Joins the Army* from Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 13.

<sup>2</sup> See Suzanne Pepper, *The Civil War in China: The Political Struggle 1945-1949* (Lanham, Md., Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> See Huang Ke, Gan Zhehu and Chen Lei, *Lao Shanghai manhua*, 310-311.

<sup>4</sup> Yang Guo, *Baishi Leping* 92. Farquhar, *Children Literature*, 204.

scholars fail to understand its deeper political message. Actually, *SJTA* did not promote the interest of political parties, but sought to express the artist's concerns about war and its effects on the population. As his first comic serial published after the war, what does *SJTA* tell us about the artist's idea of war? Why in 1946 did Zhang Leping decide to draw a humoristic story about the War of Resistance and how could humour be deployed in describing such a tragic event? Did his *Sanmao* comics still target child readers? To understand the message of *SJTA*, it is necessary to connect this comic on one side with the artist's barely finished experience as a propagandist during the war; and on the other with the escalating violence between the Nationalists and the Communists which would lead to the Civil War. In this chapter, I explain how, through a comic description of the War of Resistance, Zhang Leping not only offered to his public an original interpretation of the war events, but also articulated his critical anti-war thoughts in relation to the contemporary political struggle. We should not forget that *SJTA* signalled Zhang Leping's return to the urban entertainment industry after years as a propagandist. The war experience deeply influenced the style and aims of Zhang Leping's work. While during the war he had employed the technical skills he had learned working for the commercial press in the production of propaganda cartoons, after his return to Shanghai he incorporated themes of his wartime work and experience into his new comics.

## **ZHANG LEPING AND CARTOON POLITICS IN SHANGHAI IN THE POST-WAR YEARS 1945-1946**

The end of the Second Sino-Japanese War in the summer 1945 did not bring peace to China; on the contrary, the defeat of the Japanese signalled the beginning of a new conflict between the Nationalists and the Communists. In the last years of the War of Resistance, the two parties had already restarted their internal struggle for the control of the country. Although the Nationalists remained the official power during the Second World War, the Communist Party – headed by Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893-1979) – consolidated their power in the ShaanGanNing border area (*Shan Gan Ning bianqu*, 陝甘寧邊區).<sup>5</sup> The CCP's military forces were also able to compete

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<sup>5</sup> Officially established on 6 September 1937 by the CCP, the name originated from the first characters of the three provinces where it was located: Shanxi, Gangxi and Ningxia Province. The capital was Yan'an. Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, 188.

with the military forces of the Nationalist Government, which could not allow another political power to maintain such a large military presence in China. A conflict between the two parties seemed more and more probable.<sup>6</sup> When Zhang Leping came back to Shanghai in December 1945, the Nationalists and the Communists, under the pressure of the United States, were still trying to reach an agreement over the establishment of a coalition.<sup>7</sup> However, both the leaders of the two factions – Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong – knew that a conflict was inevitable. Clashes between the armies of the two parties also continued during the negotiations which took place in Chongqing between August and October 1945. An agreement between the two was reached in January 1946, but it had a short life. In the next six months, the Communists occupied Manchuria. Full scale war between the Nationalists and the Communists broke out by the end of June 1946. This was the beginning of the civil conflict which afflicted the already devastated country till the final victory of the CCP in 1949.<sup>8</sup>

Chinese cartoonists' production between 1945 and 1946 reflected the unstable political situation of their country. Although during the War of Resistance, Chinese cartoonists were basically united in the common attempt to educate the population in the context of the propaganda campaign organized under the Second United Front, after the defeat of the Japanese and with the approach of a conflict between China's main political parties, cartoonists had to reorganize and adjust their production to the new socio-political condition of the country. As pointed out by Hung, Chinese cartoonists ceased being propagandists, becoming instead opinion makers, able to 'shape popular sentiments'.<sup>9</sup> Those cartoonists who had decided to join the resistance during the war, pursuing the same ideal of liberating China from the Japanese, at the end of the conflict began to employ their cartoons as a means for exposing the shortcomings of contemporary society and of the two main political parties, the GMD and the CCP. Some of them made clear which party they supported in the inevitably approaching civil war; others – among them Zhang Leping – did not make a clear decision between the two political forces.

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<sup>6</sup> Mitter, *War with Japan*, 373

<sup>7</sup> Yang Guo, *Baishi Leping*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the military history of the Civil War see: Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Hung, "The Fuming Image," 123.

During the War of Resistance, several cartoonists moved to the Communist occupied areas, working for the party's newspapers.<sup>10</sup> In 1945, artists like Hua Junwu 華君武 (1915-2010) and Zhang E 張謨 (1910-1995) who had moved to Yan'an in 1941, remained loyal to the CCP, and started producing caricatures portraits of Chiang Kai-shek denouncing his incompetence and greed.<sup>11</sup> Other cartoonists did not move to Yan'an, but made clear with whom their preferences lay. For instance, in 1945 Liao Bingxiong and Zhang Guangyu 張光宇 (1902-1965) denounced the corruption and mismanagement of the Nationalist Party in two series of cartoons entitled respectively *Cat Kingdom* (貓國春, *Maoguo chunqiu*) *Journey to the West* (西遊漫記, *Xiyou Manji*). Liao Bingxiong's show *The Cat Kingdom* was held for the first time in the wartime capital Chongqing at the Sino-Soviet Cultural Association (中蘇文化協會, *Zhongsu wenhua xiehui*) in March 1945, and later in Chengdu and Kunming.<sup>12</sup> The series was composed by more than one hundred pieces representing a world dominated by corrupt cats and oppressed mice, presenting to the public a relatively straightforward metaphor of the Nationalists' deeds.<sup>13</sup> The same year cartoonist Zhang Guangyu exhibited in Chongqing his *Journey to the West*, his personal interpretation of the homonymous Ming classic novel.<sup>14</sup> In his cartoons, Zhang Guangyu described the pilgrimage of the monk Tripitaka, who experienced the political decadence, economic crisis and difficult social conditions of contemporary China.

While Yan'an attracted those cartoonists who openly supported the CCP, most remained in the area controlled by the Nationalist Party. Shanghai attracted back some of the most popular cartoonists – like Zhang Leping – who reorganized and restarted their careers in the metropolis. Shanghai was not the same city they had left in 1937; years of war had changed the socio-political background of the city.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the cartoonists' aims and opinions had changed after working as propagandists around the country, and they soon decided to put down in black and white the ideas which inspired their post-war production. On 24 February 1946, the leftist daily

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<sup>10</sup> Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 235-244.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-244. I will deal in detail with the production of cartoons in the CCP's areas in the next chapter.

<sup>12</sup> Hung, "The Fuming Image," 122.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>14</sup> Attributed to Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩, written during the 16th century.

<sup>15</sup> On the situation of the economy and society after the war see Susan Pepper, *The Civil War in China: The Political Struggle 1945-1949* (Lanham, Md., Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

*Wenhui Newspaper* (*Wenhui bao*, 文匯報)<sup>16</sup> published in the section 'Weekly Symposium' (*Xingqi tanzuo*, 星期談座) an article entitled 'Cartoonists looking back and looking forward' (*Manhua jie de huigu yu qianzhan* 漫畫界的回顧與前瞻), where seven cartoonists – Zhang Leping included – put forward their ideas about the past and the future of Chinese graphic arts. The discussion was divided into two sections: one about cartoonists' work during the War of Resistance; the other about the artists' future aims. The last section was entitled 'Democracy! It's not possible without cartoons' (*Minzhu! Buneng meiyou manhua*, 民主! 不能没有文化), a title which underlined the political dimension of cartoonists' work. Zhang Leping contributed to the discussion with a piece entitled 'We cannot retire from military service' (*Women buneng jie jia*, 我們不能解甲):

Cartoons are both art and work, but they are not art for the sake of art, since they must include both style and content. A successful cartoon must inspire questions, criticize mistakes, analyze in a clear way its subject; it should be similar to an intelligent piece of writing, since it should allow its public to clearly understand the main issue. Even more, a cartoon should make people ashamed, it should give them a headache, making them cry without tears and laugh without making a sound. Cartoons are not the clown of the visual arts; on the contrary they are the bugle that wakes up the world! (...) Now that our enemies have been defeated, we cannot retire from military service, in today's environment we have to carry on working to understand our position, impartially and seriously.<sup>17</sup>

With these words, Zhang Leping made clear the new aims of his art: although the War of Resistance had come to an end, cartoons remained powerful weapons for commenting on contemporary reality and shaping people's minds. Other cartoonists shared Zhang Leping's ideas and aims. However, most of them did not resume drawing comics inspired by the *hua ji* jokes so popular in the 1930s. Zhang Leping was one of the few cartoonists to rely on slapstick humour

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<sup>16</sup> Zhang Jishu, "Though reform and Press Nationalism in Shanghai: The *Wenhui Newspaper* in the early 1950s," *Twentieth-Century China*, Vol.35, No. 3 (April 2010):52-80.

<sup>17</sup> Zhang Leping, "*Minzhu! Bu neng mei you manhua!* " 民主! 不能没有漫畫! [Democracy! We cannot do without *manhua*!], *Wenhui bao*, 21 February 1946.

for his post-war strips, but this choice did not prevent him from engaging with the thorny problems which afflicted his country.

In March 1946, several of the writers, actors and artists who came back to Shanghai after the war established the Shanghai Fine Arts Authors Association (*Shanghai meishu zuojia xiehui*, 上海美術作家協會), whose aim was to employ art in order to comment on the contemporary conditions of their country (Fig. 1).<sup>18</sup> Cartoonists participated to the project, and on 5 June 1946 they founded the Shanghai Cartoonists Association (*Shanghai manhuajia xiehui*, 上海漫畫家協會). This association reunited many cartoonists who participated in the war propaganda effort, among who were Zhang Leping, Ye Qianyu, Ding Cong and Wang Zimei.<sup>19</sup>



Fig. 1: A group picture of the members of the Shanghai Fine Arts Authors Society (*Shanghai meishu zuojia xiehui*, 上海美術作家協會). Zhang Leping stands in the back row; he is the fifth from the left.<sup>20</sup>

Zhang Leping's activities as a member of the Shanghai Fine Arts Authors Association and of the Shanghai Cartoonists Association did not pass unnoticed. Several magazines reported the artist's

<sup>18</sup> Huang Ke, Gan Zhehu and Chen Lei, *Lao Shanghai manhua*, 294.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>20</sup> Zhang Leping, *Zhang Leping: wo de manhua shenghuo*, 44.



return to the city. The editor of *New Report Weekly* (*Xinbao Zhoukan*, 新報週刊) claimed that: 'At the moment, cartoonist Zhang Leping is the most advanced and modern artist. His art pieces are published in the most famous magazines and newspapers around the country, while his name has been well known for more than ten years (...)'. Similarly, the magazine *China Digest* (*Zhongguo Wenzhai*, 中國文摘) also commented enthusiastically on the return of the cartoonist: 'After eight years of separation, we can finally see Zhang Leping again in his second hometown Shanghai. He is obviously more tired and thin than before, but this is not a loss for him, but an honour'. The magazine *Appearance* (*Xianxiang*, 現象) welcomed him as a war hero: 'Mr. Zhang Leping joined the ranks of those comrades who fought during the War of Resistance (...) after their victory, how should we welcome this militant cartoonist?' The periodical *Sea Wind* (*Haifeng*, 海風) chose to underline Zhang Leping's military deeds, reminding readers that: '[He is] a militant artist. From the outbreak of the hostilities, he maintained his position employing propaganda cartoons as weapons (...) his works were truthful, all were technically mature, impetuous and simple, they grasped the contemporary reality.'<sup>21</sup>

As appears from these articles, despite his long absence, Zhang Leping remained a renowned artist in Shanghai. He was praised for his militant role as a member of the National Cartoon Propaganda Corps. Moreover, Zhang Leping's return to the city gave him the opportunity to start drawing comic serials and cartoons again for the commercial press. As the war ended, Zhang ceased to be an artist at the service of the government; now returned publishing entertaining comics for adults and children. In late 1945, Zhang Leping decided to bring back *Sanmao* to the pages of Shanghai's magazines and newspapers. Could his public enjoy the humour contained in *Sanmao* strips after all the suffering caused by the war and still at the mercy of an unstable situation? Even the *Sea Wind*, the first magazine to host the adventures of the little hero after the war, finished the article dedicated to Zhang Leping by posing the question: 'We are wondering, will his masterpiece *Sanmao* – which attracted in the past a vast audience – again be able to meet his readers' expectations?'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Yang Guo, *Baishi Leping*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

*Sea Wind* hosted the adventures of Sanmao between December 1945 and the first months of 1946. In these strips the artist abandoned the tragic images of the war. Yet, behind the humoristic surface, these strips were not meant only to entertain, but also to inform the public. An interesting example was a strip published on 22 December 1945 entitled 'Under Heaven and on Earth' (*Tianxia he dishang*, 天下和地上) (Fig.2).<sup>23</sup> In the first panel, an official exercises his calligraphy skills under the attentive eyes of Sanmao. The man writes on a scroll 'Everything under heaven belongs to all' (*Tianxia weigong*, 天下為公), an aphorism from the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*, 禮記) famous for being one of Sun Yat Sen's favourite quotes.<sup>24</sup> However, once he discovered that the table is not stable, the official walks away leaving his unfinished work on the floor. He comes back later, just in time to find out that Sanmao has also written his personal scroll, which says: 'The base is not even' (*Dishang buping*, 地上不平).

The aim of this strip was to entertain readers combining humour and social critique, raising their awareness towards contemporary politics and society.<sup>25</sup> The comical power of this strip has two distinct sources, connected with the two possible understandings of Sanmao's sentence. The child's attempt to copy the official by writing his own scroll is the first layer of interpretation of this strip. Sanmao is unaware of the antique origin of the quotation 'Everything under heaven belongs to all'; therefore in writing his own sentence the child breaks the rules of traditional calligraphy. Furthermore, in the attempt to imitate the official's scroll, the little hero upsets the rule, employing the traditional four-character structure typical of classical Chinese in order to compose a banal sentence. The child's entrepreneurial behaviour is funny, but the double meaning of Sanmao's sentence gives to the strip a social connotation. The sentence *Dishang vuping*, 地上不平 can be understood in two ways: the first meaning is 'The base is not even', with reference to the slanted table used by the official; but the phrase can also mean 'Nothing on earth is equal', statement which turns the original meaning of the quote upside down. What the child's sentence says is that we are supposedly equal under heaven, but things are very unequal on the ground. This interpretation is strengthened by Sanmao's decision to substitute the first two

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<sup>23</sup> Image from the Sanmao official website: <http://www.sanmao.com.cn/message/newspaper/417zh.html>. Last access 18 April 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Liji: Liyun 1 (禮記:禮運 1).

<sup>25</sup> Zhang Leping, "Minzhu! Bu neng mei you manhua!", *Wenhui bao*, 24 February 1946.

characters of the original quotation with two characters bearing an opposite meaning. For instance, he switches the character for 'sky' *tian* 天 with the character for 'ground' *di* 地, and the character for 'down' *xia* 下 for that for 'up' *shang* 上. In this way, the new sentence stands in direct opposition to the original version, guiding the reader to understand a more complex meaning in the strip. Finally, the strip also suggests that officials pretend to be noble Confucians, while they are in reality causing inequality on earth.

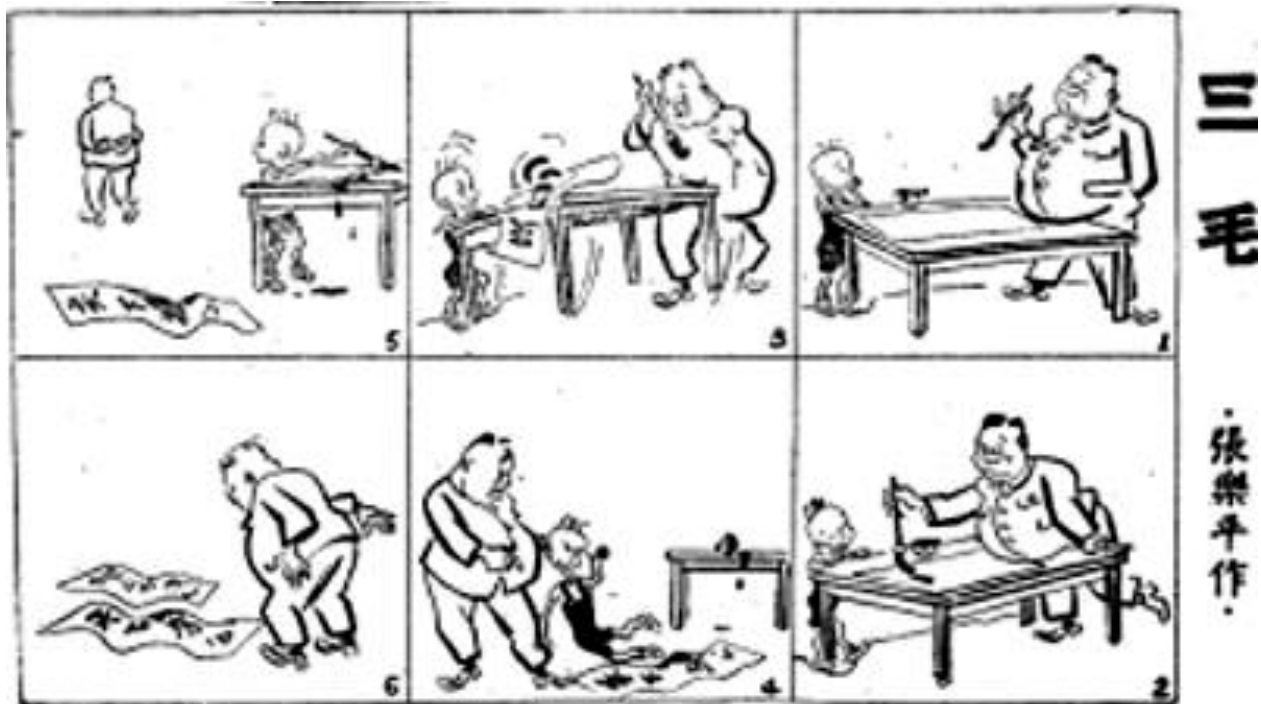


Fig. 2: Zhang Leping: (*Tianxia he dishang*, 天下和地上). From *Sea Wind* 海風, Issue 10, 22 December 1945.

The strips published in *Sea Wind* were only the first step of Zhang Leping's post-war career. Between 1946 and 1949, he published cartoons and comic strips in at least thirty-one different publications, including the popular newspapers *Wenhuibao*, *Shenbao*, *Dagongbao* and the three magazines *Children's World* (*Ertong Shijie*, 兒童世界), *Children's Life* (*Ertong Shenghuo*, 兒童生活) and *Enlightened Early Youth* (*Kaiming Shaonian*, 開明少年).<sup>26</sup> The two comic serials published in *Shenbao* between 1946 and 1947 – *Sanmao Joins the Army* and *Sanmao's Unauthorized Biography* (*Sanmao waizhuan*, 三毛外傳) – re-launched Zhang Leping's

<sup>26</sup> Yang Guo, *Baishi Leping*, 46.

popularity in Shanghai and all over China. Although published in the same newspaper, the content of these two comic series differed greatly. While *Sanmao's Unauthorized Biography* – published between 5 November 1946 and 9 January 1947 – was a collection of humorous strips which recalled the style and often the situations of Zhang Leping's pre-war strips, *Sanmao Joins the Army* mixed the narrative techniques of *lianhuanhua*, slapstick humour and political criticism, marking an important turning point in the cartoonist's artistic production.<sup>27</sup>

### **THE ORIGIN OF *SANMAO JOINS THE ARMY*: ZHANG LEPING'S SKETCHES FROM THE BATTLEFIELD IN ZHEXI AND ZHUJI AFTER THE DEVASTATION**

Although published in 1946, Zhang Leping set *Sanmao Joins the Army* during the just-ended conflict with the Japanese, during which the artist had the occasion to witness both the hardship of Chinese soldiers on the battlefield and the tribulations suffered by civilians. In his new serial, the artist described Sanmao's experience as a soldier in the barracks as well as on the battlefield. Where did Zhang Leping draw inspiration for these strips? To better understand the content, meaning and relevance of *SJTA*, it is necessary to come back to Zhang Leping's wartime production. Some of the sketches produced by artists during the War of Resistance focused on the life of Chinese soldiers in the barracks and on the destruction caused by the Japanese in the countryside. These sketches reveal a perspective on war contrasting with the heroic vision disseminated by most of the propaganda cartoons. Zhang Leping's wartime production was not limited to standardized propagandistic images; on the contrary on some occasions he described the everyday experience of wartime. In this section, I analyze two series of sketches drawn by Zhang Leping between 1939 and 1940 – *Sketches from Zhexi Battlefield* (*Zhexi zhandi sumiao*, 浙西戰地素描) and *Zhuji after the Devastation* (*Jiehou zhuji*, 劫後諸暨)<sup>28</sup> – which can provide us with some information about the origin of *SJTA*. Some of the characters and situations of his post-war cartoons referred to a number of the images he sketched while working between Zhejiang and Jiangxi Province during the war.

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<sup>27</sup> Yi Ke, Wei Ming and Wang Jun, *Xiaorensu de lishi*, 40-44.

<sup>28</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun. *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 60 and 120.

In the spring of 1939, Zhang Leping stayed for some time in the city of Jinhua, in Jiangxi Province, one of the most strategic centres of the Third Front.<sup>29</sup> There, Zhang Leping exhibited his new work, a series of drawings entitled *Sketches from the Battlefield in Zhexi*, where he presented his views on the military activities of the Chinese soldiers. The same images were later published in *Frontline Daily*.<sup>30</sup> These sketches represent a soldier's everyday life in Zhejiang province in the areas under the administration of the Western Zhejiang Provincial Administrative Office (*Zhexi xinshu*, 浙西行署), instituted by the Nationalist Government in January 1939. These sketches represented soldiers busy performing all sorts of activities: cleaning their weapons, sewing torn uniforms, cutting hair, resting and lying wounded waiting for help. These images differed greatly from the iconographic representations of soldiers presented in contemporary cartoons, which mostly represented Chinese soldiers fighting and performing heroic deeds. On the contrary, in *Sketches from the Battlefield in Zhexi*, Chinese soldiers are depicted while performing duties which do not necessarily involve fighting. For instance, in 'Sewing Uniforms' (*Fengbu junyi*, 縫補軍衣) a soldier is portrayed while mending his uniform (Fig. 3); while in 'Digging Trenches' (*Wa zhanhao*, 挖戰壕), a group of men excavate a ditch (Fig. 4). The collection did not shun dramatic situations, for instance in 'Wounds of Glory' (*Guangrong de fushang*, 光荣的負傷), Zhang Leping depicted an injured soldier lying on a stretcher waiting for help (Fig.5).

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<sup>29</sup> During the war, the city of Jinhua was under the administration of Jiangxi Province, while nowadays it is situated in Zhejiang Province.

<sup>30</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 60-69.



Fig. 3: Zhang Leping. 'Sewing Uniforms' (*Fengbu junyi*, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji* 縫補軍衣), *Frontline Daily*, 1939.<sup>31</sup>



Fig. 4: Zhang Leping. 'Digging Trenches' (*Wa zhanhao*, 挖戰壕), *Frontline Daily*, 1939.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 63.



Fig. 5: Zhang Leping. 'Wounds of Glory' (*Guangrong de fushang*, 光荣的负伤), *Frontline Daily*, 1939.<sup>33</sup>

*Sketches from the Battlefield* differed from contemporary cartoons introduced in the previous chapter for at least two reasons: firstly, here Zhang Leping did not present soldiers as stereotypical figures; on the contrary these images humanized Chinese soldiers normally portrayed as fighting machines. Secondly, these images did not contain the overwhelming symbolism and the satirical bite of other propaganda cartoons, but look like realistic portrayals of soldiers' lives. Yet, *Sketches from the Battlefield* were a product of wartime propaganda. Despite their realistic style, these sketches show well-disciplined and industrious soldiers, avoiding description of problems and difficult living conditions in military barracks. Even the wounded soldier, though suffering, has had careful medical attention. The title of this sketch, 'Wounds of Glory', reveals that Zhang Leping's main aim was to celebrate the Chinese army, avoiding description of problematic situations. Nevertheless, *Sketches from the Battlefield* demonstrate Zhang Leping's knowledge of soldiers' life on the barricades, the predominant theme of *Sanmao Joins the Army*. These sketches differed from propaganda cartoons also stylistically. For instance, while most wartime images conveyed a sense of movement and urgency through standardized rhetorical devices – such as little lines which communicated movement or simplified facial expressions which could easily show the feelings of the characters – these

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 65.

sketches are more naturalistic in style, and stand apart from the stylized representations of cartoon and comic strips.

Besides soldiers, Zhang Leping also drew sketches of civilian life in wartime. The artist described the plight of the inhabitants of the old city of Zhuji, in Zhejiang Province, in thirteen drawings entitled *Zhuji after the Devastation*, which he published in *Southeast Daily* (*Dongnan Ribao*, 東南日報) in 1940.<sup>34</sup> The suffering of Chinese civilians during the war has become the subject of study of several western scholars. Years of warfare led to the deterioration of the economic structure, while the displacement for millions of people caused serious difficulties at social structure of the country.<sup>35</sup> As we have seen, propaganda cartoons often described civilians' suffering. The stereotyped features of these images, and the caricatured outlines of the protagonists together with their excessive rhetoric made of these cartoons a symbolic representation almost detached from reality. However, in *Zhuji after the Devastation* Zhang Leping draws images which stand out from this standardized model, presenting a more genuine description of human suffering.

In the winter of 1940, Zhang Leping arrived in Shaoxing 紹興 in Zhejiang Province, where he worked for the *Southeast Daily*. Because of the continuous assaults of the Japanese, in 1940 Shaoxing was cut off from the food supply system. Furthermore, several natural calamities worsened the condition of the population. In the sketches he produced at the time, Zhang Leping portrayed in realistic fashion the disruption provoked by Japanese bombing in the old city of Zhuji.<sup>36</sup> Destroyed buildings and suffering people were skilfully portrayed by the artist in black and white sketches which described the desperate situation of Chinese civilians, from shop owners to children. For instance, in 'A Group Waiting for Assistance' (*Dai jiuji de yiqun*, 待救濟的一羣), two adults and two children looking destitute sit on the street waiting for help, as pointed out by the caption (Fig. 6). In his sketches, Zhang Leping also described people's daily activities, underlining the difficulties they had to endure. For instance, in 'Collecting among the

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<sup>34</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun. *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 118-126.

<sup>35</sup> See for example Diana Lary, *Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See also Diana Lary and Stephen R. McKinnon ed., *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare in Modern China* (Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> City in Zhejiang Province, positioned south of the provincial capital Hangzhou.



Debris' (*Zai canyuanduanbi zhong jianshi*, 在殘垣斷壁中撿拾), two women and one man are looking for things (or perhaps food) among the rubbles (Fig. 7). Finally, a sketch entitled 'Orphan' (*Gu' er*, 孤兒) is another example of how in *Zhuji after the Devastation* Zhang Leping engaged with propagandistic iconography while breaking with the standard representation. As we have seen, Chinese orphans were usually represented as victims, yet able to transform themselves into courageous champions of the national cause. By contrast, this orphan appeared lonely, poor and helpless. (Fig.8). Also, in contrast with the images analyzed in the previous chapter in which civilians appeared ready to fight the enemy, in these sketches all the protagonists look thin, desperate and hopeless. They communicate feelings of resignation, which would never have appeared in more standardized cartoons. The characters described above are victims of the war, but they are neither dying in pain nor fighting back. However, as in the case of *Sketches from the Battlefield*, these images did not contradict the message of other propaganda cartoons, since they focus on Japanese's bombing as the cause of civilians' suffering and loss of properties.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the images of *Zhuji after the Devastation* were stylistically very similar to *Sketches from the Battlefield*, in that they also differed greatly from the stylized representation and defined lines of his comics. In this case, Zhang Leping deployed shadows in order to give more plasticity to his characters.

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<sup>37</sup> Apparently, the series also included the portraits of two respectable men of Zhuji, Fang Guiren 方桂人 and Gao Zifang 高子芳, who were killed by the Japanese soldiers while trying to protect the population from the fury of the enemies. Their images were followed by a text describing their sacrifice and the brutality of the Japanese. See Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 127-128.



Fig. 6: Zhang Leping. 'A Group Waiting for Assistance' (*Dai Jiuji de yiqun*, 待救濟的一羣), *Southeast Daily*, 1940.<sup>38</sup>

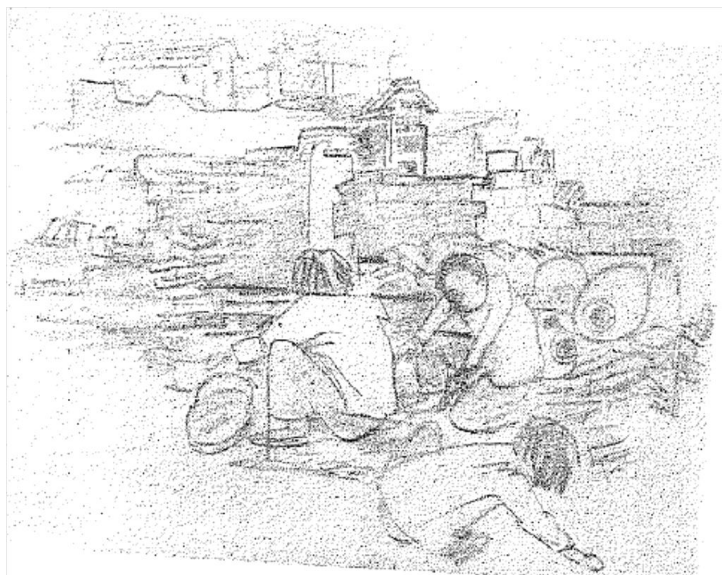


Fig. 7: Zhang Leping. 'Collecting among the Debris' (*Zai canyuanduanbi zhong jianshi*, 在殘垣斷壁中撿拾), *Southeast Daily*, 1940.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 124.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.



Fig. 8: Zhang Leping. 'Orphan' (*Gu' er*, 孤兒),  
*Southeast Daily*, 1940.<sup>40</sup>

In 1939, the engraver Xiang Huangtu 項荒途 (1915-1942) commented upon *Sketches from the Battlefield in Zhexi* and other similar works of Zhang Leping in the magazine *Strong Wind*:

Nowadays Zhang Leping lives in the middle of the fight; he really observes the life of the battlefield. His wartime production – no matter whether the style of work and the content fulfil the necessities of the war – is not incomprehensible to the people for its abstractionism (*chouxiang*, 抽象) or for their specialized features (...). Through the hundreds of images produced, Zhang Leping represents reality for the sake of truth, he tries to deepen his comprehension of the reality he lives in, and furthermore he doesn't forget to improve his artistic skills. I personally know Zhang Leping, and I think that many artists could learn a lot from him (...) He is capable of reporting reality; furthermore all his subjects are related to war issues. For instance, in these one hundred sketches he shows us the regular recreation of the soldiers at the front, their strong friendships, how they build Timushan according to the political plan. He also describes students in the occupied areas, the education of the population in the war areas, and the life of the ranks at war. (...) The subjects of his images are versatile, but he is not guilty of employing naturalism (*ziran zhuyi*, 自然主義)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 121.

indiscriminately, nor he is guilty of mechanically picking up a slogan making it the subject of his work like in the case of formulism (*gongshi zhuyi*, 公式主義).<sup>41</sup>

Xiang Huangtu praised Zhang Leping for his dedication to the national cause, and his attentive description of everyday life in war time. The engraver is positively impressed by the realism of these images, in contrast to the highly symbolical content of some propaganda cartoons. Xiang Huangtu's positive view of Zhang Leping's realistic description of the situation is not a surprise, since Chinese woodcut artists were deeply influenced by Soviet graphic-art, which privileged realistic portrayals over abstract images.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, according to the engraver, Zhang Leping managed to produce realistic representations of daily life without forgetting his main mission of educating the Chinese population about war. Since they fulfil propagandistic aims, the artist's images were not bluntly 'naturalistic' description of reality, but neither were they simply channels for the dissemination of war slogans. *Sketches from the Battlefield in Zhexi* and *Zhuji after the Devastation*, show Zhang Leping's personal interest in and understanding of the life of soldiers and civilians during the conflict. At the end of the War of Resistance the artist elaborated on these themes in *SJTA*.

## WAR AND HUMOUR IN *SANMAO JOINS THE ARMY*.

In 1946, China was a country nearly destroyed by the war against the Japanese and on the verge of a dramatic civil conflict between the Nationalists and the Communists. It was in this fragile political and social situation that Zhang Leping started publishing *SJTA* in *Shenbao* (Fig. 9). Returning to the city and to the urban public, the artist resumed the humoristic style of his pre-war strips. In the previous chapter I explained how during the war some of Zhang Leping's strips were not devoid of comic features, but humour was actually employed in order to mock enemies and traitors.<sup>43</sup> If during the wartime the humoristic tones in Zhang Leping's strips served the

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<sup>41</sup> Xiang Huangtu 項荒途, "Du zhandi sumiao yuzhan hou" 讀戰地素描預展後 [After watching the pre-view of *Sketches from the Battlefield*], *Strong Wind (Dafeng 大風)*, Issue 109, 1940. Reprinted in Qiu Yue and Zhang Weijun, *Sanmao zhi ye congjun ji*, 60.

<sup>42</sup> Tang Xiaobing, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 150-151.

<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 2.

propagandistic aim of attacking the enemy, at the end of the conflict the artist resumed drawing strips containing light-hearted political and social criticism. Nevertheless, to think that the war experience did not leave any effects on Zhang Leping's work would be a mistake. For instance, in *SJTA* the artist introduced several innovations. The most specific characteristic of *SJTA* was the way in which drama and humour mixed, creating a controversial story about the recently finished War of Resistance. In this section, I concentrate on the humorous features of *SJTA*, explaining how Zhang Leping managed to draw a comic story about war, making 'people shake with laughter, presenting to them a thought-provoking theme'.<sup>44</sup>



Fig. 9: Zhang Leping drawing a strip of *SJTA*, Shanghai 1946.<sup>45</sup>

*SJTA*, narrated the adventures of the little hero as a soldier during the War of Resistance. The plot of the comic serial was quite simple: the child decides to become a soldier in order to defeat the Japanese army. While Zhang's pre-war *Sanmao* strips were independent sketches connected only by the main protagonist; *SJTA* is a story with a beginning and an end. Zhang Leping explained his decision to transform his little hero into a soldier in his preface for the comic book of *SJTA* printed in January 1947:

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<sup>44</sup> Feng Chuyin. *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Seven or eight years ago 'joining the army' was a new subject which touched the hearts of many people, but now it has become a dull hackneyed theme. Bombs have become a subject which has stopped attracting people's attention for different reasons. Playing the same old tune is something that people naturally dislike. However, since for eight years men and women, young and old participated to the war, I thought it was strange that Sanmao did not participate in it, and therefore I did not think too much about it, whether he was qualified or not, I decided to make him to join the army. I was so excited that unavoidably my work came out full of inconsistencies. Speaking of Sanmao's age, it is absolutely unreasonable for him to join the army and go to fight. My decision to create an exaggerated farce is even more unreasonable, for instance since these strips do not represent courage, inevitably they lose the original meaning of joining the army (which is to be courageous). Therefore it was difficult for me to find any appropriate way to represent Sanmao's role in the barracks.<sup>46</sup>

According to Zhang Leping, while during the conflict the subject of war attracted the attention of the public, by 1946 warfare became a hackneyed topic. Everybody had still a clear memory of war, but the subject had been touched on so many times that most probably the public was eager to read about new topics. Nevertheless, since the artist knew that almost everybody was somehow involved in the conflict, he also believed that Sanmao had to experience the life of the battlefield. Unfortunately, because of his young age it was not easy for the little child to enter the army.<sup>47</sup> In his introduction, Zhang Leping also acknowledged the peculiarities of his new serial, explaining the difficulties he encountered while drawing it. The idea that a child like Sanmao could join the army might sound unreasonable for many readers, since military barracks are not a child-friendly place. However, describing life in the barracks through Sanmao's eyes was perhaps the best way to present the topic of war to people from a new perspective. The artist also claimed that in *SJTA* he consciously transformed Sanmao into a clown, underlining the comic tone of the serial. While during the war humour was solely employed to criticize the enemy, in his post-war comic Zhang Leping broke this unwritten rule, by using those humourous tones

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<sup>46</sup> Zhang Leping's preface to the comic book of *SJTA*, January 1947.

<sup>47</sup> The official age to join the army was 18. See the introduction of Lily Chang, "Contested Childhoods".

which defined urban entertainment in the 1930s, but applying them to a non-urban theme such as life in a military barracks.

Zhang Leping claimed that Sanmao never joined the army; however, as we have seen in the previous chapter, during the war the artist showed the little hero trying to enlist in the army in 'Sanmao's Broadsword'.<sup>48</sup> The first strip of *SJTA*, published on 12 May 1946, shares several features with this wartime strip. In the new strip, the little hero arrives at the conscription desk determined to become a soldier, but the official in charge sends him away because of his young age. The child refuses to give up his plan, so he decides to try his fortune disguising himself as an adult. He returns to the conscription office walking on stilts, which he covers with long pants. A western style jacket and a hat complete his costume. Surprisingly, Sanmao manages to trick the soldier in charge of recruitment, and he is able to start life as a soldier (Fig. 10).<sup>49</sup> This strip and 'Sanmao Broadsword' shared a similar theme – Sanmao's attempt to join the army – but their undertones differed significantly. While the wartime strip aimed at displaying Sanmao's patriotism, in *SJTA* Zhang Leping ridicules the soldier who is not able to recognize a child disguised as an adult. The child's trick, the soldier's confused reaction and the absurd positive outcome of the little hero's plan set the humoristic tone for the entire serial. As we will see, Sanmao's young age was the main propeller of comic situations in *SJTA*, together with the unflattering description of Chinese soldiers, officials and the Japanese.

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<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>49</sup> This strip was censored by the CCP after 1949, and substituted with a different image. See: Chen Minjie, "From Victory to Victimization: The Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) as Depicted in Chinese Youth," *Bookbirds*, Vol.47, No. 2 (2009): 29.

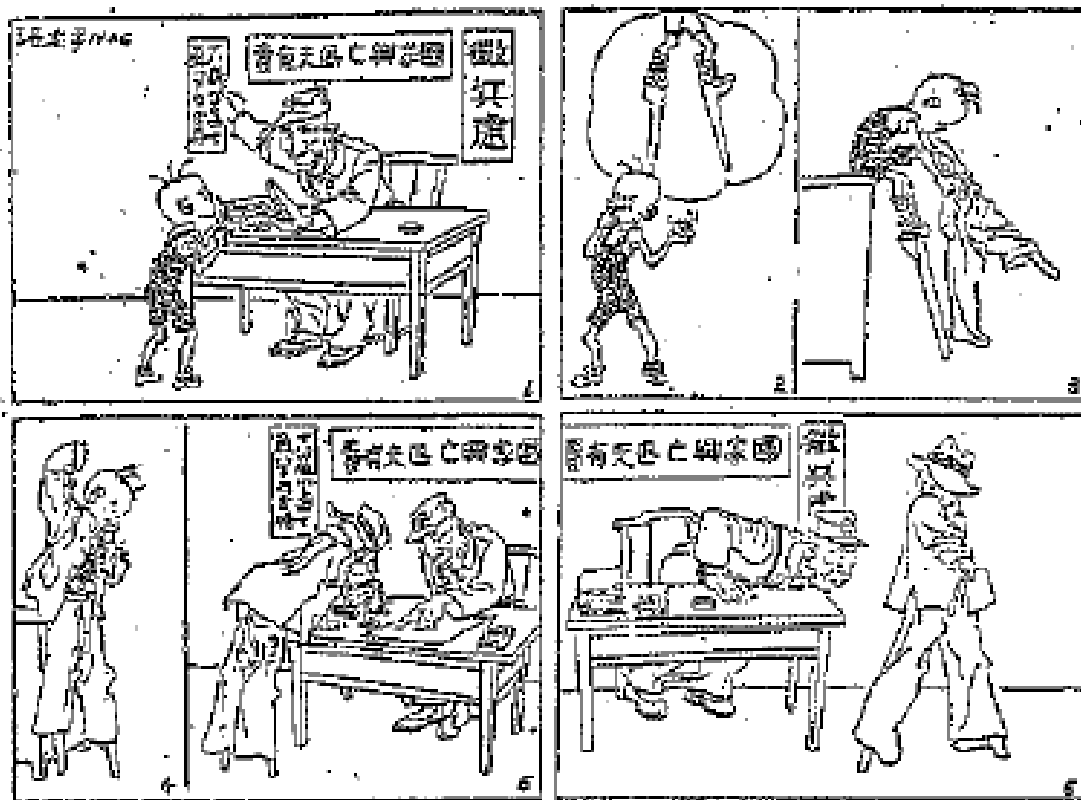


Fig. 10: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 12 May 1946. Sanmao goes to the Conscription office (徵兵處, *zhengbingchu*), as pointed out by one of the posters hung on the wall.

To understand the originality of *SJTA*, it would be useful to describe briefly the structure of this comic. The serial is composed of several independent stories, developed in single or multiple strips. As a soldier, Sanmao spends his time in two main places: working in the barracks or fighting on the battlefield. The longer sequences are those dedicated to military action, normally described through at least ten consecutive comic strips. By contrast, episodes of Sanmao's daily life in the barracks often occupy single strips divided into four or more panels. Despite their briefness, these episodes outnumber the fighting scenes, and they are therefore very important for the structure of the story. Although *SJTA* was a complete narrative, readers could enjoy individual strips, since most of them function as independent short-stories understandable outside the main narrative of the serial.



The comic power of the strips was based on the classic structure of *huaji* jokes, which consisted in turning upside down the expectation of readers at the end of every strip. For instance, in the first panel of a strip published on 8 August 1946, Sanmao discovers two hand grenades (*shouliudan*, 手榴彈) left unattended. Suspecting an ambush, the child informs two other soldiers about the situation. However, once on the spot they discover that the suspicious hand grenades are in reality harmless bottles, part of the lunch box of a fellow soldier (Fig. 11).<sup>50</sup> Besides the surprising ending of the story, the facial expressions of all the characters contribute to the humoristic intent of the strip. In the first panel, Zhang Leping well describes the seriousness of the situation through the concerned face of Sanmao, and later through the worried look of the two soldiers. In the last panel, the satisfied and happy face of the worker enjoying his drink stands in contrast not only with the tense situation presented previously, but also with Sanmao's surprised look, signalled by his wide open mouth and by the confused expressions of his fellow soldiers. As in the 1930s, slapstick humour remained the core of the comic strength of Zhang Leping's strips. The expressions of the characters and their body language were as effective as long dialogues in the comic economy of the story.

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<sup>50</sup> Although he does not wear a uniform, the owner of the bottles is most probably a soldier building foxholes or trenches. In his propaganda cartoons, Zhang Leping portrayed soldiers digging foxholes wearing short pants and big hats, like the character of the last panel of this strip.

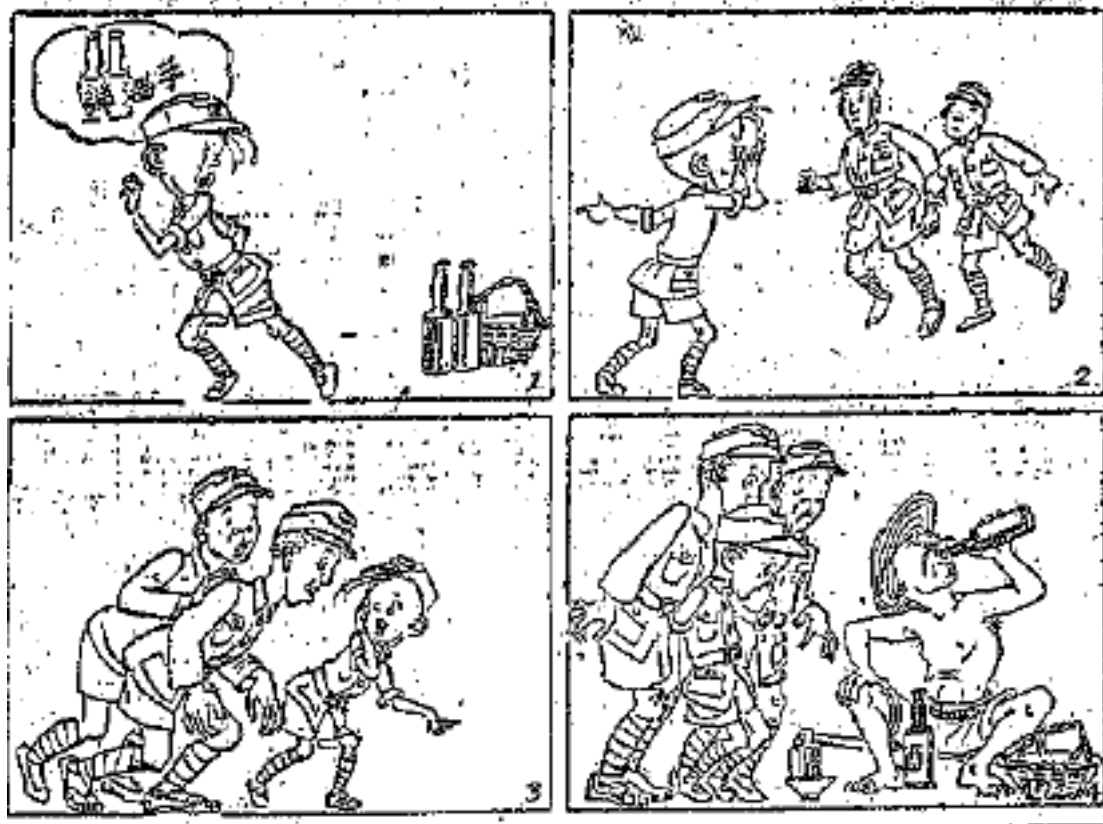


Fig. 11: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 8 August 1946. In the first panel, Sanmao's thoughts are revealed in a speech-bubble saying 'hand- grenades' (*shouliudan*, 手榴彈); while in the last panel the character for alcohol *jiu* 酒 appears clearly on the label of the bottles.

Besides structure and slapstick humour, Sanmao was the undisputed hero of the serial and the main source of laughter. The hero's young age gave a farcical tone to the story fundamental to serial's several humorous moments. *SJTA* is based on the idea that the child should not be a soldier, since he is not able to perform all the activities of this role. In particular, the comic tension between the child's age and his work as a soldier was released in three types of situations which were repeated several times: laughter was caused firstly by Sanmao's inability to complete his duties because of his young age; secondly by his fortuitous heroic deeds on the battlefield, and finally by the child's personal understanding of military rules.

The little hero's tiny body is completely unsuited to the most banal military activities. The child tries to imitate his older colleagues, mostly with disastrous results. Nevertheless, he is able to

find unexpected solutions to his problems. For instance, in a strip published on 22 July 1946,<sup>51</sup> the little hero helps a soldier to install a wire-fence. The work consists of hammering big pieces of wood into the ground. The soldier appears tired of lifting the heavy hammer, so Sanmao decides to help him. He tries to lift the tool, but the hammer is far too heavy for the child, who fails miserably in his attempt. In the last panel, we see the child hanging up-side-down from the hammer causing the surprised reaction of his colleague (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 22 July 1946.

Sanmao often finds creative solutions to his problems, mostly with comical results. Despite his tender age, on several occasions Zhang Leping's hero manages to follow the activities of his adult colleagues thanks to ingenious tricks. In the strips published on 23 June 1946, Sanmao follows military training. The child is running in a column together with other soldiers, but soon he realizes that he is unable to keep up with their pace. Zhang depicts his physical exhaustion

<sup>51</sup> In contrast to other work of Zhang Leping, the strips of *Sanmao Joins the Army* did not have titles. Therefore, I will indicate only the date of publication in *Shen bao*.

well, showing the child's iconic three locks glued to his sweaty forehead. Soon, the naughty hero finds a solution: he borrows a push scooter from a child playing on the street, and thanks to his new transportation he is finally able to line up with his surprised comrades (Fig.13).<sup>52</sup>

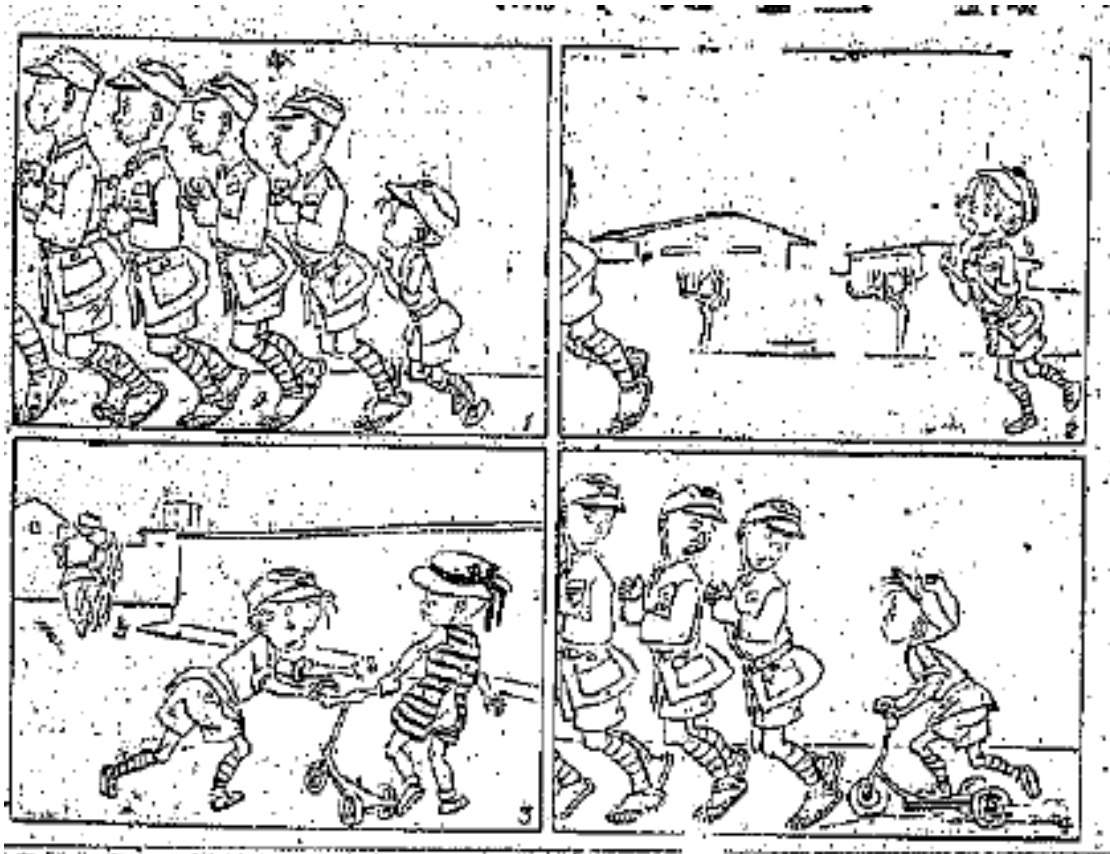


Fig. 13: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 23 June 1946.

If young age and frail body are causes for concern in Sanmao's daily life, the child realizes that they can be an advantage during actual fights against the Japanese. In *SJTA*, the little hero faces his enemies on five occasions, always successfully.<sup>53</sup> As it appears, the child is actually more skilful than other soldiers in surviving combat situations, but Sanmao owes his achievements more to pure luck than to his courage. As pointed out by the editor of *Dagongbao* Wang Yunsheng 王芸生 (1901-1980), in *SJTA* the child's actions were “sort of heroic” (*chabuduo*

<sup>52</sup> Another child appears in *Sanmao Joins the Army* in the strip published on 13 May 1946. These children are always well dressed; they are perhaps officials' sons.

<sup>53</sup> Sanmao fights against the Japanese on five occasions: in strips from 14-15 May, 24-28 June, 28 July, 10-12 August and 21-30 August (1946).

*yingxiongxing*, 差不多英雄型),<sup>54</sup> sentence which underlined how the character's epic deeds were often more the result of his good fortune than of his skills. For instance, in the first of a series of three strips which appeared in *Shenbao* between 10 August and 12 August, Sanmao marches apparently relaxed in front of one of his comrades. Suddenly, a Japanese sniper shoots at them, taking them by surprise. While the soldier dies, hit by the bullet, the child survives thanks to his small stature. The little hero decides to retaliate. Since the Japanese soldier has not noticed him yet, Sanmao decides to boost his stature by mounting a scarecrow on his shoulders; then he charges at his enemy. Unaware of the child's deception, the Japanese aims at the chest of the 'fake' soldier, but his bullets leave Sanmao unharmed. Probably believing in some supernatural ploy, the soldier surrenders to his unbeatable adversary (Fig. 14-15). Although the strips tell a tragic story in which a Chinese soldier loses his life, Sanmao's luck and his unawareness of the danger give to comical twist to the scene. In this case, these strips present two comical elements: on one side, the child's bright idea; on the other, the Japanese soldier's wrong assumption.

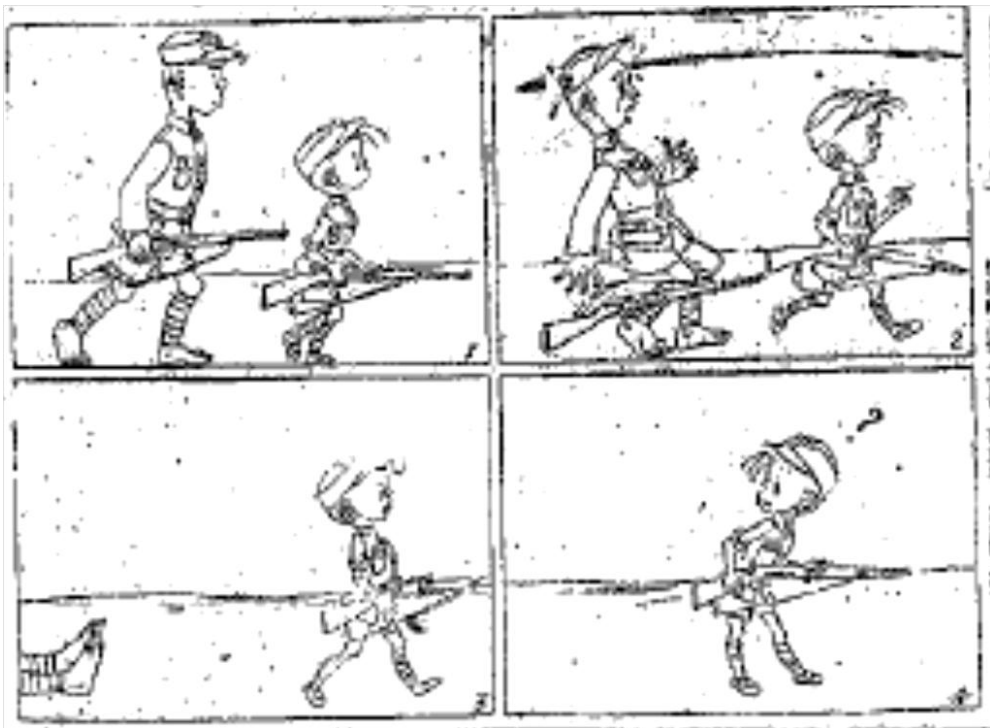


Fig. 14: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 10 August 1946.

<sup>54</sup> Wang Yunsheng, "Ti «Sanmao Liulangji»" 題《三毛流浪記》[About *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* ], *Dagongbao*, 23 March 1948.

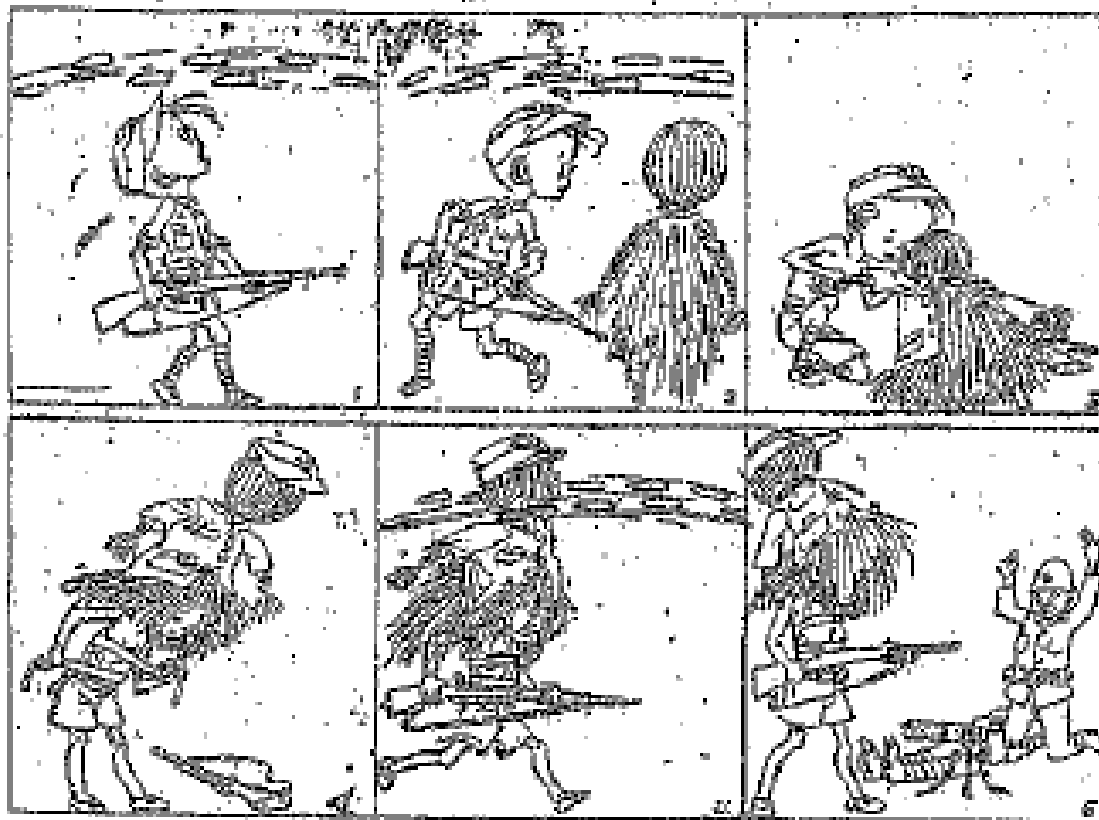


Fig. 15: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 11 August 1946.

Sanmao's incomprehension of military regulations and hierarchy were also a recurring source of laughter. On several occasions the little hero unconsciously breaks rules, spreading confusion among his comrades and superiors. Often the child commits minor misdeeds such as in the strip published on 18 May, where he decides to pierce his hat in order to let his three locks free to stand. Unfortunately, the child's new outfit does not pass unnoticed. A soldier sees the strange outfit of the little hero, whose personalized hat is soon replaced with an unbreakable metal helmet (Fig. 16).

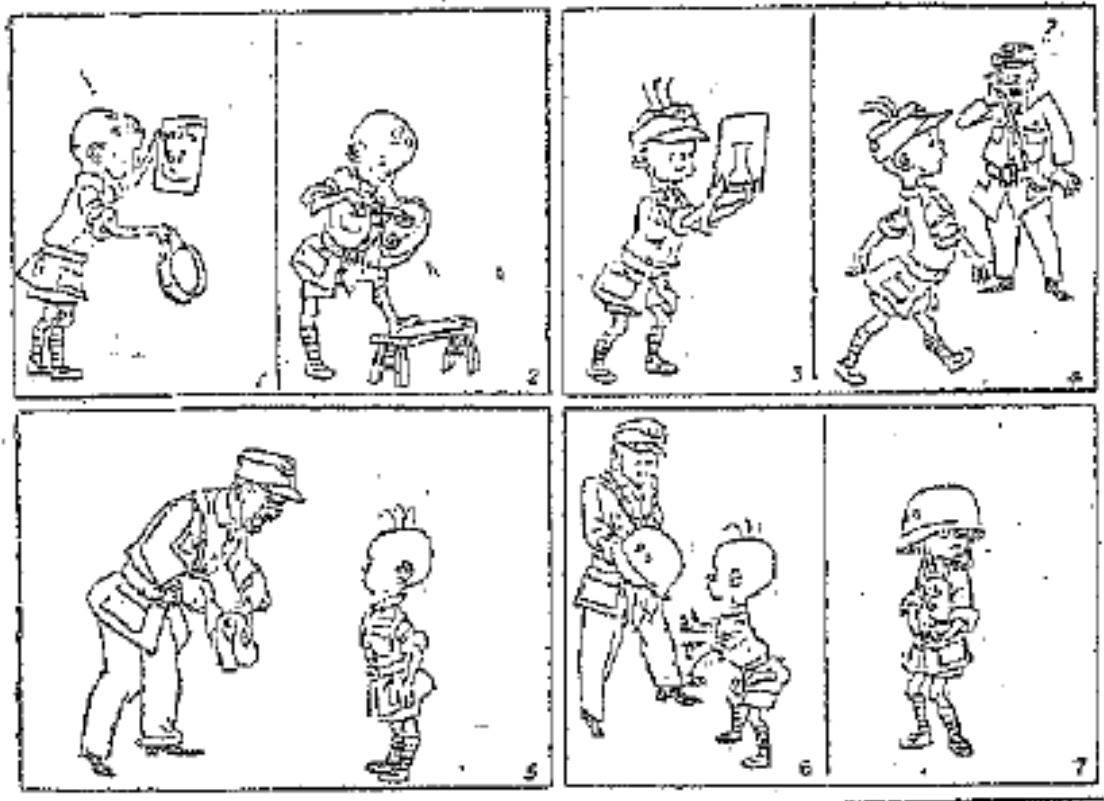


Fig. 16: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 18 May 1946.

The farcical touch given to the strips by Sanmao's young age and his paradoxical work in the military were the main source of laughter in the strips. Even so, the actions and personalities of soldiers were essential elements in the humoristic success of *SJTA*. Zhang Leping depicted Chinese soldiers in a caricatured manner, dismissing the heroic images of wartime. In general, a caricature relies on portraying a person exaggerating his physical features so that they reflect the moral imperfections of the subject.<sup>55</sup> In the case of *SJTA*, the soldiers' physical looks were not caricatured, but their deeds were instead. Their relationship with the little hero is the most evident proof. In some cases Sanmao's comrades try to help the little hero in his daily activities, but most of the time they mistreat him showing little regard for the child and for their work in general. For instance, Sanmao is often victim of his comrades' jokes. In the strip published on 30 May, a soldier offers a juicy pear to the excited child. The little hero tries to grab the pear, but his comrade invites him to wait. The man turns his back to the puzzled Sanmao, and starts doing something with the fruit. In the last panel, we discover that the soldier has drawn eyes and a

<sup>55</sup> John Geipel, *The Cartoon*, 21-25.

mouth on the pear, producing a quite realistic imitation of Sanmao's face, which shocks the little hero (Fig. 17). The humoristic power of this strip relies on both the soldier's mockery and on Sanmao's behaviour. While in *SJTA* the little hero tries to act like an adult, in this case he behaves like a normal child: he tries to grasp the pear even if it is outside his reach and he is very surprised by the adult's trick. The success of the soldier's joke is based on Sanmao's young age, since the child cannot fight for the fruit and he has to wait for his comrade to give him the pear. Clearly, the soldier appears quite despicable for making fun of his younger colleague.

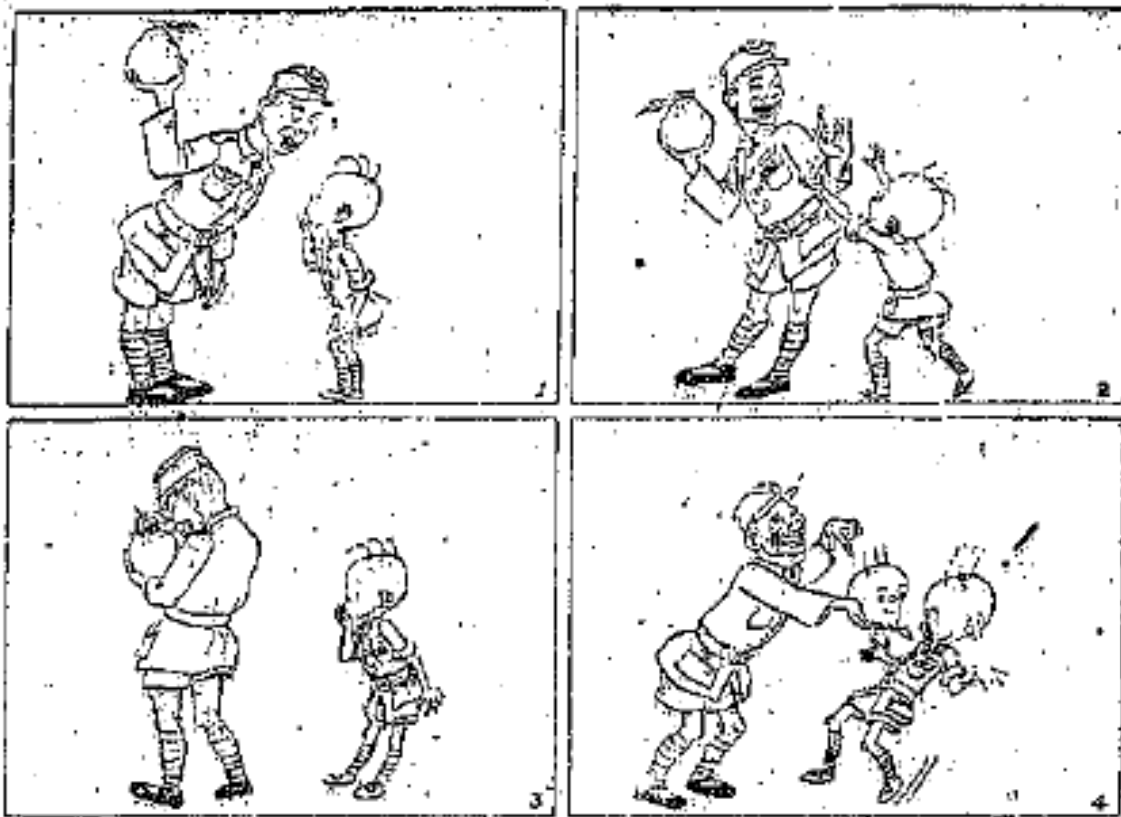


Fig. 17: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 30 May 1946

Soldiers sometimes seem less wise than the child. Instead of being exemplary figures, these men were often scolded by the child for their unacceptable behaviour. In one strip, the little hero witnesses a quarrel between two comrades. In order to put the fight to an end, Sanmao decides to splash water on the two contending soldiers. Towering over the fighters with a satisfied face, the child is clearly glad to have solved the conflict. Unfortunately, the situation changes quite rapidly. Acknowledging the presence of the child, the two soldiers stop fighting and join hands in order



to throw Sanmao into a big barrel full of water. Then the two go back to their quarrel under the stupefied eyes of the child (Fig.18). Sanmao is shown to be wiser than his fellow comrades, yet once again physical strength appears to be most important quality in the army. Certainly, the soldiers' actions were significant elements in the humoristic result of the story, even if Zhang Leping' decision to portray soldiers as anti-heroes hides a specific socio-political message, as I will show in the following pages.



Fig. 18: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 13 November 1946.

Japanese soldiers were also part of the humoristic spectacle created by Zhang Leping. As in the case of Chinese soldiers, the Japanese are portrayed in a caricatured manner. While during the War of Resistance the Japanese were mostly depicted as ferocious enemies, in *SJTA* they were mostly represented as fearful dullards.<sup>56</sup> On several occasions Sanmao manages to defeat them because of their mediocre fighting skills and their sloppiness, as shown in one of the longest

<sup>56</sup> On this subject see Barack Kushner, "Unwarranted Attention," 47-81.

episodes of the comic serial. In it, Sanmao's comrades oblige the child to attack a Japanese squad alone. In a desperate attempt to defeat the enemies, the little hero throws a hand grenade at the group, but instead of his enemies he hits an innocent cow. Fortunately, the Japanese find the dead animal and decide to cook it, and soon the dinner degenerates into a party. Thanks to this unexpected outcome, Sanmao is able to capture the completely drunk soldiers, bringing the prisoners to the Chinese military camp (Fig.19). This unflattering representation of Japanese soldiers showed the public the human side of the enemy; probably led by hunger, they decided to eat the cow killed by Sanmao.

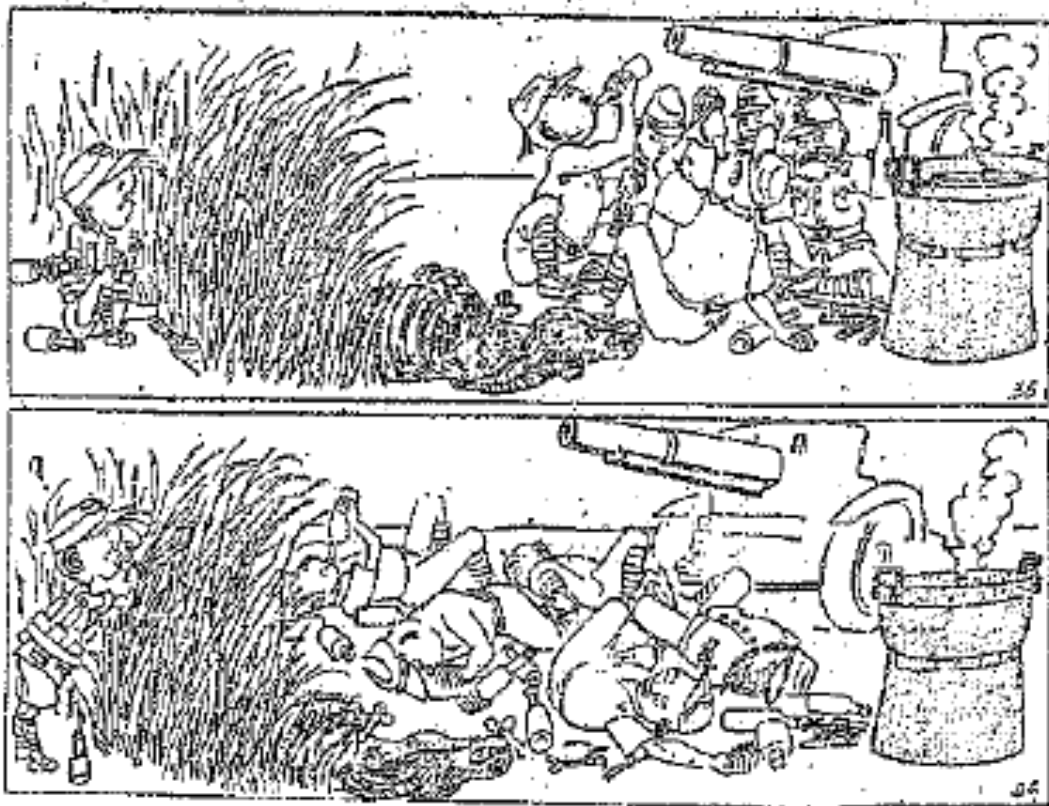


Fig. 19: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 29 August 1946.

Although the caricatured representations of Chinese soldiers and Japanese enemies were mainly designed to make the readers laugh, Zhang Leping's idea of creating a comical revision of the War of Resistance also concealed powerful political messages, as we will see in the next section.

## REINTERPRETING THE WAR OF RESISTANCE: THE POLITICS OF HUMOUR IN *SANMAO JOINS THE ARMY*

As we have seen, when Zhang Leping returned to Shanghai he claimed to be determined to employ his art to 'inspire questions, criticize mistakes, and analyze its subject in a clear way.'<sup>57</sup> In this perspective, his decision to draw a humoristic comic about the past events of the War of Resistance was unusual. While literary and visual depictions of the war were widespread during the conflict, at the end of the hostilities the public's attention was mostly focused on the country's disastrous conditions and on the renewed divergences between Nationalist and Communist Party. Although the Sino-Japanese conflict was the main cause of destruction, it almost disappeared from public discourse.<sup>58</sup> Against expectation, Zhang Leping decided to come back to the subject of war in his comic strips. Certainly, to approach a tragic event such as war with humoristic tones was a challenge; yet, as shown in the previous section, the humoristic dimension of *SJTA* is unquestionable. This comic was composed mostly of comic sketches designed to entertain readers with the little hero's funny adventures. By employing humour in his description of the conflict, Zhang Leping might also have been trying to help his readers, and perhaps himself, to come to terms with the tragic experience of war. In a similar way, in most of the novels produced after the Second World War in the U.S. humour was used in order to bring relief to the readers.<sup>59</sup> Still, to analyze Zhang Leping's comic only as a humoristic product with cathartic effects on the afflicted population is limiting. In the previous section I described how the humour of *SJTA* was based, on the one hand, on the juxtaposition of Sanmao's young age and his life in the army, and on the other hand, on the unflattering portrayal of Chinese and Japanese soldiers. In this section I delineate how Zhang Leping mixed a humoristic tone with the tragic description of war in order to provide his public with a new vision of the War of Resistance. In contrast to his wartime cartoons, *SJTA* was no longer based on the necessity to fight against the Japanese, but was supposed to make his readers to reflect on the just-ended war.

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<sup>57</sup> Zhang Leping, "Minzhu! Bu neng mei you manhua!" *Wenhui bao*, 21 February 1946.

<sup>58</sup> It came back after 1979, as pointed out by Parks M. Coble, "The Legacy of China Wartime Reporting, 1937-1945: Can the Past Serve the Present?," *Modern China*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (July 2010): 435-460.

<sup>59</sup> Arne Axelsson, "Fun as Hell: War and Humor in some post World War II American Novels," *Studia Neophilologica*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (2008): 265.

To better understand the political value of *SJTA*, it is useful to understand how humour has been employed outside China in the description of war. In his book *War, Memory and the Politics of Humor: The Canard Enchaîné and World War I*, Allen Douglas analyzed how during WWI humour was employed by the popular French weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* for political purposes.<sup>60</sup> According to Douglas, the writers of the *Canard* used techniques such as parody, antiphrastic irony, repetition and exploitation of stereotypes in order to counter the official heroic and patriotic rhetoric of the wartime French press. Commenting on the reality of war in humoristic tones, the *Canard* tried to reveal to the public the 'climate of patriotic mendacity that surrounded the war' by exposing to satirical gaze the lies which lay behind the official representation of the conflict.<sup>61</sup> *Le Canard Enchaîné* is a good example of how humour could be used to challenge the information provided by the official press, also one of the aims of *SJTA*.

In his analysis of American novels about the Second World War published in the 1960s, Arne Axelsson claims that humour became a relevant mode of expression for writers dealing with the conflict. Humour was employed in two ways in military novels: it could 'weaken the impact of disaster', or it could 'intensify the horror of war and the boredom of military training'.<sup>62</sup> In particular, the scholar focused on how American writers managed to mix the horror of war with humoristic features introducing gory details into the middle of otherwise comic situations. Juxtaposing 'slaughter and laughter', writers pushed their readers to think about the reality of war.<sup>63</sup> Joseph Heller's (1923-1999) *Catch-22* (1961) is one of the most popular novels in which humour and war were mixed creating an absurd – yet believable – description of the conflict. The novel followed the adventures of the members of a fictional American squadron deployed in Corsica trying their best to remain sane during the Second World War.<sup>64</sup> In an interview, Heller claimed that in *Catch-22* he 'tried consciously for a comic effect juxtaposed with the tragic, working the frivolous with the catastrophic. I wanted people to laugh and then look back in

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<sup>60</sup> Allen Douglas, *War, Memory and the Politics of Humor: the Canard Enchaîné and the World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>62</sup> Arne Axelsson, "Fun as Hell," 265.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>64</sup> Joseph Heller, *Catch 22* (London: Vintage, 1994). Originally published in 1961 in New York by Simon and Schuster, 1961.

horror at what they were laughing at.' <sup>65</sup> Zhang Leping employed the same rhetorical methods in *SJTA* obtaining similar results.

The *Canard Enchaîné* and *Catch-22* are just two examples of the artistic encounter between war and laughter, and Zhang Leping's employment of humour in *SJTA* shared features with both the satirical weekly and the humorous novel. Zhang's strips tried to reveal to the public 'the climate of patriotic mendacity that surrounded the war', while *SJTA* shared with *Catch-22* the idea of mixing drama and humour inviting readers to reflect on the reality of war. Moreover, *SJTA* shared another feature with the novel. Although *Catch-22* was a novel about the Second World War, it aimed to speak about events taking place in the 1950s, when Heller wrote the story. In these years, the Korean War, the Cold War and – when the book was published in 1961 – the Vietnam War were contemporary events which were changing the life of many people more than the conflict described in his novel.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Zhang Leping published *SJTA* at the dawn of the Civil War between the Communists and the Nationalists. The specific historical moment in which Zhang Leping created this comic strip is central to the understanding of the story. Similarly to *Canard Enchaîné* and *Catch-22*, with his strips Zhang Leping inspired questions on the wartime reality in two different ways: first, the humoristic features of Sanmao, of Chinese soldiers, and of their enemies can be read as a parody of the iconic images produced during the war, bringing the reliability of these portrayals into question. Secondly, this farcical description of the conflict communicated the author's disillusionment with war and victory, playing down the patriotic tones while underlining the dark side of the conflict and its consequences on soldiers and population.

As we have seen in the previous section, Sanmao's naughtiness, his fellow soldiers' behaviour and the Japanese enemies' dullness were main sources of humour of the strips. However, if we compare these portrayals with those produced by cartoonists during the war it is possible to see how the characters of *SJTA* were irreverent caricatures of wartime icons. For instance, the Sanmao of post-war comics differed greatly from the iconic figure he embodied during the war. While in the few strips published in the wartime the little hero appeared as a hero, in *SJTA*

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<sup>65</sup> Axelsson, "Fun as Hell," 266.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 269

Sanmao ceased being a model child; on the contrary his actions are often far from ideal. From the very beginning he breaks the rules, tricking the system and becoming a soldier despite his young age. Similarly, in Zhang Leping's post-war strips Chinese soldiers' behaviour was antithetical to the one presented in the propaganda cartoons. Soldiers are lazy and fearful and they certainly cannot be considered as examples for the population. Actually, they spend more time in the barracks quarrelling over irrelevant issues than fighting on the battlefield. The heroic deeds depicted in propaganda cartons are often substituted with irreverent portrayals of everyday duties. For instance, in the strips published on 17 August 1946, Sanmao guards a locked room. Judging from his serious look, something extremely important and perhaps secrete is taking place behind the door. When another soldier tries to enter, the child threatens him with his rifle. In the last panel the secret is revealed: the room was closed because of a very 'dangerous' rat hunt. The surprise effect of this episode is based on the disproportionate importance given by Sanmao and his colleague to what it appears to be a trivial activity (Fig. 20). Strips representing episodes of soldiers' daily life without tragic effects for the main characters could have a cathartic effect on the reader, who can laugh away the emotional tension and sense of tragedy caused by war. However, as we will see, Zhang Leping also introduced various strips, which were only partially funny, in which Sanmao and his fellow soldiers had to deal with physical discomfort, brutality and death.

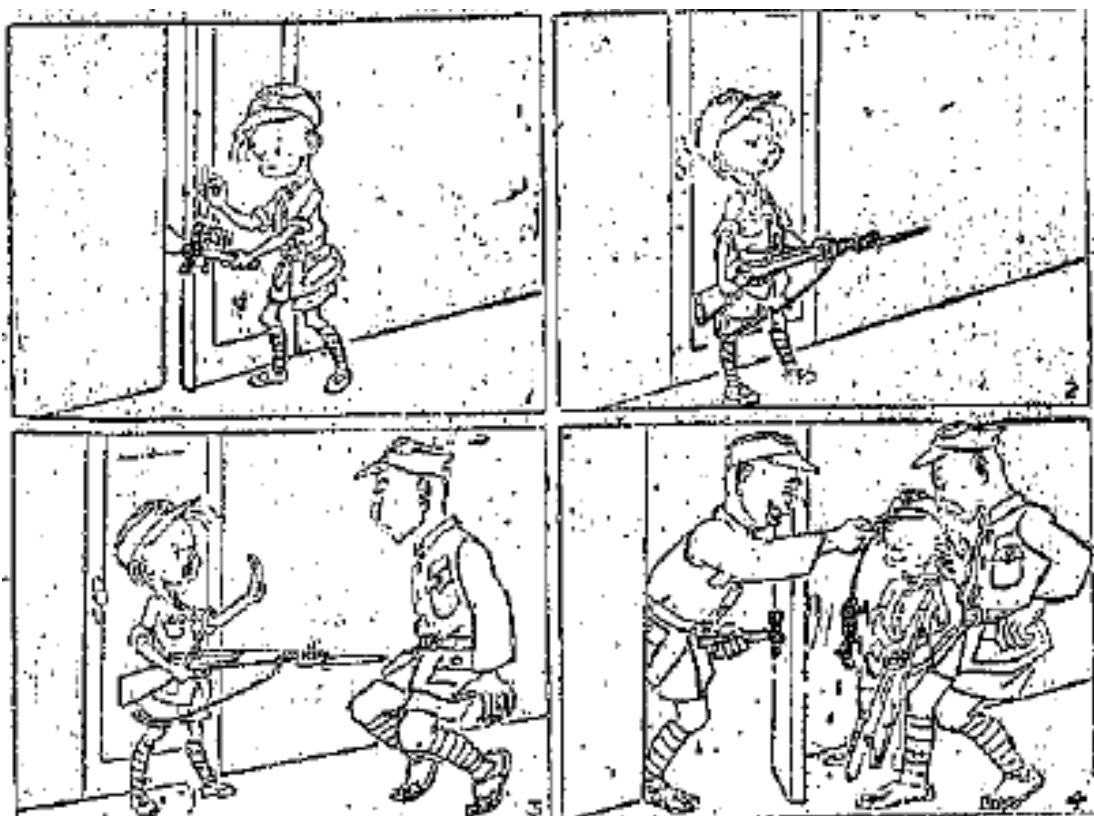


Fig. 20: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 17 August 1946.

Zhang Leping consciously introduced comic characters whose personality and actions stood in opposition to the iconic representations created during the war in order to disclose to his readers the mechanisms of propaganda. Parodying the iconology of war, he questioned the content of the propaganda campaign. Furthermore, although farcical and humoristic, the representations of soldier's daily life presented in *SJTA* were probably much more realistic than the tragic or epic scenes depicted in wartime cartoons. It was also not the case that many scenes of *SJTA* recalled Zhang Leping's *Sketches from the Battlefield in Zhexi*, where soldiers were portrayed while performing their everyday activities.

Zhang Leping did not fail to point out how the behaviour of the Japanese and Chinese was often connected with their stressful life. Hunger was one of the major issues. In the previous section we saw how Japanese soldiers did not hesitate to eat the cow killed by Sanmao's grenade. Similarly, on several occasions the little hero and his colleagues are portrayed while fighting over food. In a strip published on 16 September 1946, Sanmao finds a crab in a hole in the

ground. He decides to cook it, but in the last panel we see that two soldiers steal the crab, leaving the child without dinner (Fig. 21). This is not the only strip in which Sanmao has to fight for food, on the contrary the artist often describes how the child and the soldiers constantly suffer hunger, cold and physical fatigue, which leads them to commit immoral actions.

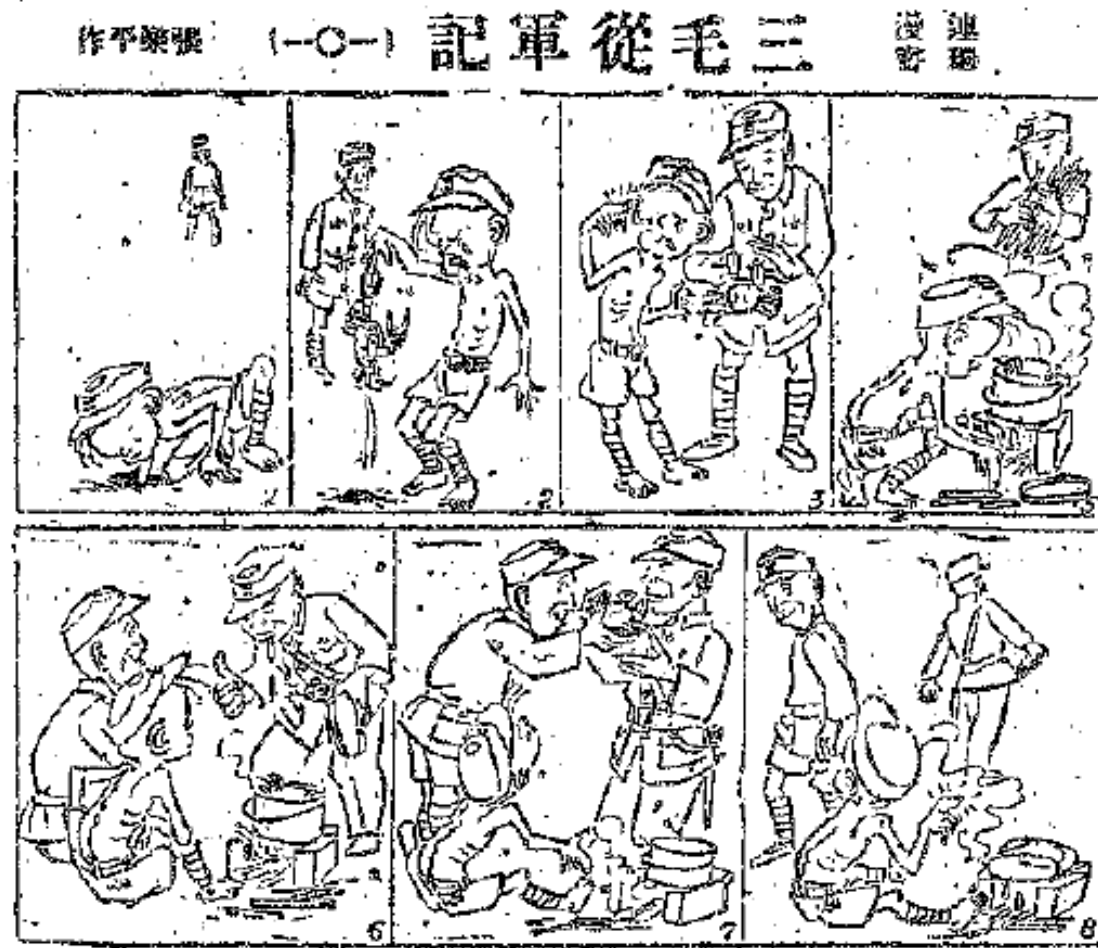


Fig. 21: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 16 September 1946.

These representations of life in the barracks were shorn of any sense of the patriotism so characteristic of wartime images. Privileging the description of daily activities in the military camps over action on the battlefield, Zhang Leping broke with the stereotypical portrayal of war. Similarly, representing cowardly soldiers, incompetent enemies, and mistreated children, he not only transformed war into a comic spectacle, but also commented on the patriotic description of warfare projected by previous propaganda images. Since patriotic rhetoric created a mendacious



account of war, Zhang Leping revealed the difference between representation and reality employing humour as the main mode of communication.

Besides subverting the iconic representations of Sanmao/children and soldiers, in some strips Zhang Leping directly referred to the power of the press to subvert the original meaning of events. For instance, in two different strips photographers appear to capture Sanmao's image; however, the content of their pictures do not reflect reality. In the first strip, published in May 1946, Sanmao returns to the military camps declaring he has killed two Japanese soldiers, bringing their rifles as proof. However, in contrast to his comrades, readers know that Sanmao's success was the result of lucky circumstances. The previous strips – published on 14 and 15 May – show how the child wanted to escape from the Japanese soldiers by hiding in a haystack. Only later does he decide to fight his enemy from his hiding place.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, once again Sanmao's success was a result of luck rather than his brave spirit. Nevertheless, unaware of the real events, everybody celebrates the child's deeds. He is presented to his comrades as a model, and he is decorated as a hero (*yingxiong*, 英雄). In the last panel, a photographer takes a portrait of the fake child-hero (Fig. 22).

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<sup>67</sup> Strips published on *Shenbao* on 14 and 15 May 1946.



Fig. 22: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 16 May 1946.

The misleading power of photography is at the centre of another strip published on 16 August, where Sanmao is once again portrayed as a hero. In this case, the child really faced alone a small group of Japanese soldiers alone. Disguised as a scarecrow, he managed to scare them and to take them to the Chinese military camp. The child's success is once again commemorated with a picture. He is invited by a superior to hold up a banner with the words 'Both Brave and Resourceful' (智勇雙全, *zhiyongshuangquan*). Unfortunately, the flag being bigger than him, in the picture Sanmao disappears behind the huge piece of cloth. Only his three hairs are visible in the photo. As a result, the picture seems to celebrate the senior soldier (Fig. 23).



Fig. 23: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 16 August 1946.

The conduct of high-ranking officials is also under attack in *SJTA*. Not only are officials on several occasions portrayed while mistreating Sanmao, but the legitimacy of their role is often placed under discussion.<sup>68</sup> For instance, in the strip published on 3 September 1946, an official shows his new medal to the little hero, which he gained after a successful mission against the Japanese. Ironically, the child decides to make a medal for himself out of a piece of paper wearing it proudly in front of the astonished official (Fig. 24). This strip can be interpreted in two ways. On one side, Sanmao's action indicates that the real heroes are the ones who personally fight on the battlefield, namely the common soldiers. On the other side, by creating a fake medal Sanmao unconsciously casts doubt on the real value of high-ranking officials.

<sup>68</sup> I will discuss further the role of officials in *SJTA* in the next section.



Fig. 24: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 3 September 1946.

*SJTA* questioned the description of war offered by different media challenging the widespread iconography of war heroes. With his farcical interpretation of the battlefield, the artist criticized the methods employed by journalists and propagandists, warning his readers about the manipulation of reality. However, Zhang Leping not only questioned only the way in which the war was presented by different media, but in the final strips he brings his criticism to an even higher level. Despite his unflattering description of Chinese soldiers' behaviour, the artist often found the explanation for the despicable actions in the precarious circumstances in which they lived. Furthermore, in showing their daily activities Zhang Leping elaborated on what he had seen and already portrayed in *Sketches from Zhexi Battlefield*. The aim of *SJTA* was not to ridicule the war effort, but to reflect on the reality of war, and its effects on the population. Sanmao's adventures point to the absurdities of war and, in so doing, deflate militaristic rhetoric.

Besides debunking the excessive heroism of wartime propaganda, in *SJTA* Zhang Leping deliberately mixed humour and violence to shock his readers. The content of the strips analyzed so far has been mostly light-hearted, though some scenes were not devoid of violence and gruesome details. As we have seen in the previous section, Sanmao's young age was the main propeller of humoristic situations in *SJTA*. Yet, making the child join the army gave Zhang Leping the possibility to create absurd situations thanks which the horror of war appeared clearer to his readers. Similarly, in his analysis of the employment of humour in American military novels, Axelsson pointed out that Heller – the author of *Catch-22* – had to make the Second World War to appear in an absurd light in order to debunk militarism and patriotism. The war against Germany seemed highly justified and extremely necessary; therefore, to comment on it in humoristic tones, the author had to create an absurd situation which readers could feel comfortable to laughing at.<sup>69</sup> The War of Resistance against the Japanese was necessary for the survival of China, but Zhang Leping managed to produce a humoristic depiction of it simply by creating an absurd situation in which an eight-year-old child enters the army and behaves as a normal soldier. On the one hand, this incongruous reality made the comic serial laughable; on the other, it allowed Zhang Leping to juxtapose the violence of war to Sanmao's young age, to highlight the gap between propagandistic representations of war and the reality of the conflict, and to show the moral issues which always emerge in the case of war.

Zhang Leping's tendency to insert gruesome details in his strips showing the most inhuman side of war is particularly clear in the strips he published between 4 and 6 June 1946. In the first strip, a Japanese soldier threatens a civilian with a bayonet. We can see that the man is not a soldier because of his attire, since he is wearing a western-style suit and a hat. The civilian tries to placate the soldier giving him his watch; but after receiving the precious object the Japanese murders the man in cold blood. Sanmao witnesses the scene hidden in the nearby bushes. In the last panel, we can see that the child is holding a hand-grenade with a resolute expression on his face (Fig. 25). In the following strip, Sanmao throws the grenade from among the bushes, in the direction of the Japanese soldier. The violent explosion that follows the child's gesture not only kills the enemy, but also amputates a hand from the soldier's body. In the third panel, we can see the hand with the watch still on the wrist flying through the air, landing in the next scene on the

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<sup>69</sup> Axelsson, "Fun as Hell," 265-266.

ground in front of the little hero, who looks at it in disbelief (Fig. 26). These two strips are packed with gruesome details: the Japanese soldier's inhuman behaviour, his violent murder, Sanmao's revenge and especially the flying piece of body reminds us that war is a cruel business. However, readers could still laugh at Sanmao's discovery of the watch on the soldier's hand, since, in spite of this violent content, the strip showed the child's success in revenging the defenceless civilian. Yet, in the strip published on 6 June Zhang Leping enriched the story with additional details, inviting his readers to reflect upon the events represented in the strips.



Fig. 25: Zhang Leping, *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 4 June 1946.

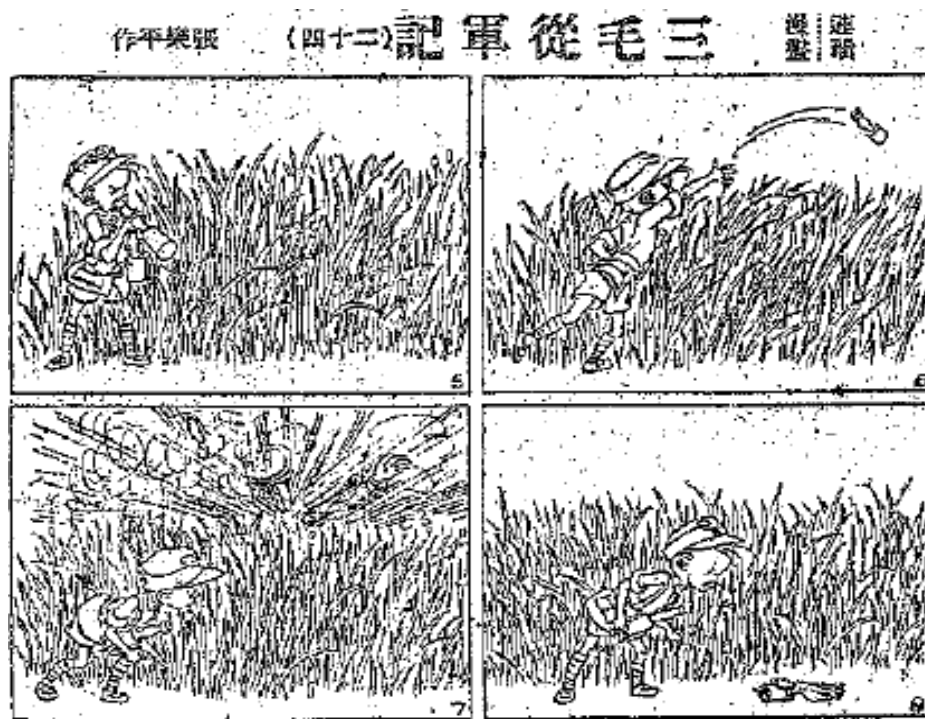


Fig. 26: Zhang Leping, *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 5 June 1946.

In the new strip, Sanmao comes back to the military base bringing the watch with him. In the first panel, the child gives the watch to his superior, indicating a place located far from them, a simple gesture through which Zhang Leping perceptively shows that the little hero is relating the previous events to the man. Pleased by the child's deeds, the soldier paternally stokes Sanmao's head, and gives him back the watch as a reward. Soon the little hero discovers that the object is too big for his wrist, and he tries to find alternative ways to wear it. In the last panel we see Sanmao proudly looking at his reflection in a mirror while wearing the watch around his neck (Fig. 27). This strip is funny and disturbing at the same time. The child's attempt at a creative solution brings a smile to the faces of readers, yet once we think how the object arrived in Sanmao's hands, the situation appears absurd and gruesome for several reasons: firstly, the watch is not a neutral prize, but the reminder of a series of brutal actions the little hero witnessed; secondly, juxtaposing Sanmao's deeds with his inability to wear the watch, Zhang Leping compares the cruelty of war with the child's age, raising questions about the ethical consequences of war.

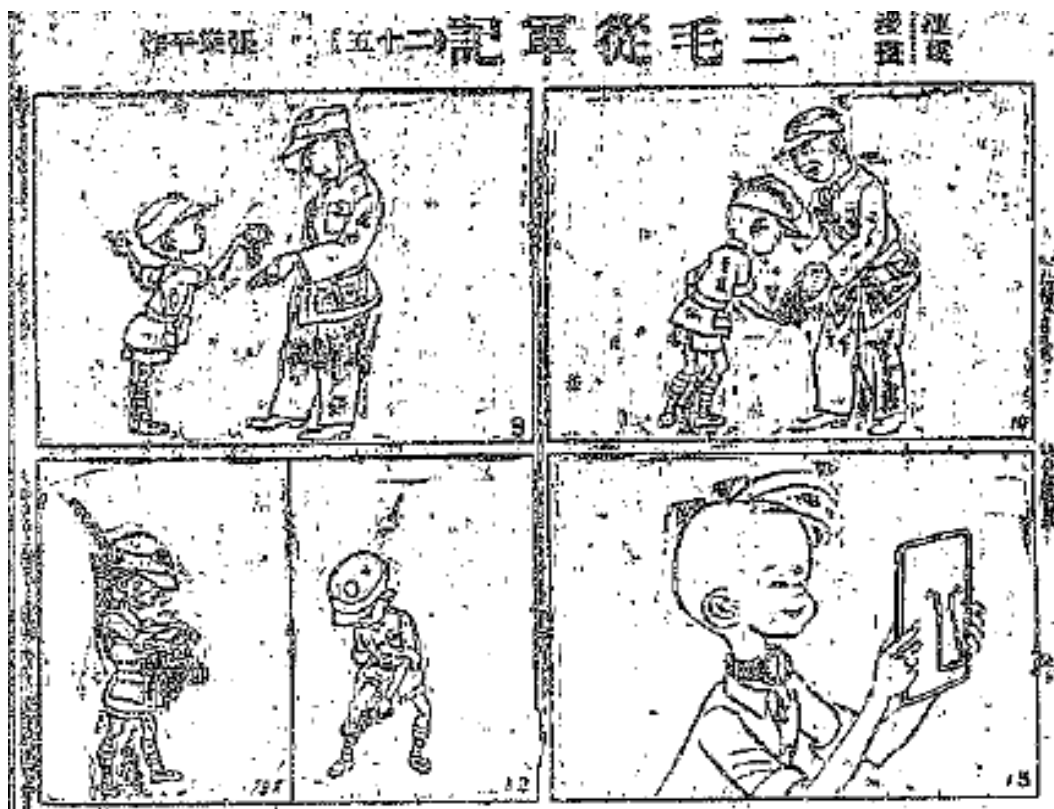


Fig. 27: Zhang Leping, *Shenbao*, 6 June 1946.

Juxtaposition was also employed in the final strips of the comic serial published on 3-4 October, where Zhang Leping offered a key to the interpretation of *SJTA*. In the strip published on 3 October, Sanmao and his comrades hear a series of explosions coming from the other side of the military base. Imagining a battle, they pick up their rifles and run towards the enemies. In reality, the noise was caused by their comrades, who were lighting firecrackers to celebrate the defeat of the Japanese and the consequent end of the war. Sanmao and his colleagues join the celebration with ecstatic smiles on their faces; in particular the child is so enthusiastic for the good news that he jumps in the air losing his hat (Fig. 28). Readers might imagine that this was the ending scene of the comic serial. After a long time of suffering and fighting, Chinese soldiers could finally enjoy peace, but Zhang Leping had a different vision of the end of the war.





Fig. 28: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 3 October 1946.

On 4 October, *Shenbao* published the concluding strip of *SJTA*, where we see how Sanmao is dismissed from military service, and is finally free to go back to his life as a civilian. However, the last panel reveals a gloomy reality. The confused Sanmao stands in front of a crossroads surrounded by fields of graves. He can only choose between two different directions: one road takes him to an arid countryside, while the other one leads to a destroyed city. Ironically, the two roads form a 'V', the letter which at the end of the Second World War became a recognized symbol for 'victory' (Fig. 29). The contrast between the last two strips of *SJTA* is striking: the joyful, chaotic and natural celebrations for the end of the war stand in contrast with the seriousness of Sanmao's predicament in the last strip. When officially discharged from military service, the child neatly and respectfully bows in front of his supervisor and finally goes back to his civilian life. The straight, dry lines in which the last panels are composed give a sense of stillness to the scene, whereas in the previous strip the celebrations for the end of the war were

portrayed in scenes of chaotic movements. The change of tone between the cheerful strip where soldiers hear the news of the end of the war and seriousness of the final scene describing what happens after the celebrations invited readers to reflect on the consequences of war.

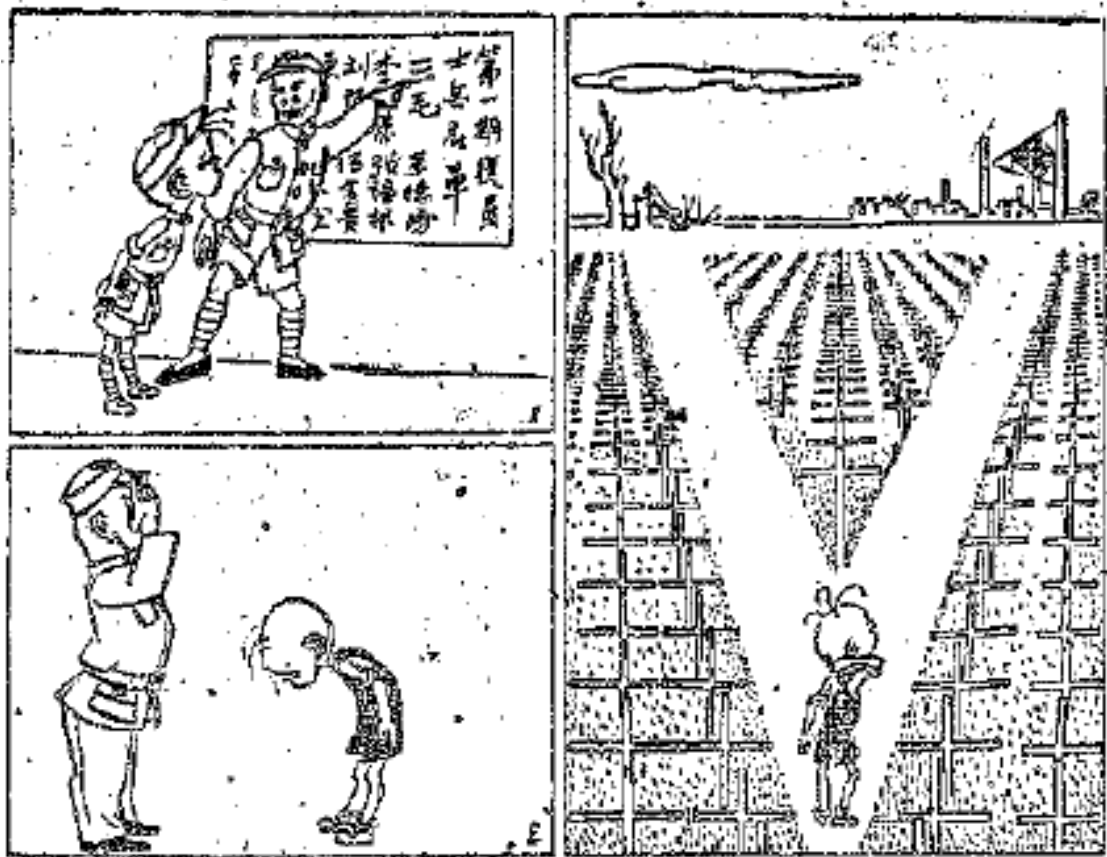


Fig. 29: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 4 October 1946.

Juxtaposition also underpins the highly symbolical final panel of the comic serial. Crosses symbolizing death form the emblematic sign of victory, showing how war claimed the lives of millions of people. Disillusionment substitutes for euphoria and the artist privileges the description of the destructive financial and social effects of war over the joy of victory. The two roads cutting between the crosses lead to two equally destroyed places. On the left we can see trees, broken and without leaves, symbolizing an infertile nature. Similarly, on the right there are houses and factories with broken roofs, abandoned and useless. Once again Zhang Leping describes Sanmao's puzzlement thanks to small, yet vivid details: the child stands in the middle of the crossroads scratching the back of his head, a gesture which indicates his confusion and inability to take a decision about his next destination.

After tens of humoristic/satirical strips, Zhang Leping closed *SJTA* with a dramatic ending. This strip should be analyzed in relation to the dramatic images of *Zhuji after the Devastation*, where the artist described the effects of the war on the population. The fight to save China from the Japanese invasion however unavoidable it was, brought immense hardships for the people. Concluding his story in tragic tones, Zhang Leping reminded his readers that, despite victory, the population still had to deal with the terrible consequences of war. With *Sanmao Joins the Army*, Zhang Leping did not want to downplay the necessity for China to fight; his active participation in the war effort testifies to the artist's support for China's resistance. Nevertheless, he tried to show the most terrifying consequences of military actions on the country and Chinese people, downplaying the process of glorification of war which took place during the conflict. Since *SJTA* was produced and published at the dawn of a new civil conflict between the GMD and the CCP, it should also be understood as the artist's personal warning about the problems the country would face with another war. In conclusion, mixing humoristic and horrific tones in describing the War of Resistance, Zhang Leping aimed to reveal the inglorious effects of military conflicts on soldiers as well as civilians, transforming his comic serial about war into a call for peace for China.

### ***SANMAO JOINS THE ARMY AS CHILDREN'S LITERATURE***

In the previous sections, I have claimed that Zhang Leping did not hesitate to employ gruesome and violent images to make his public aware of the cruelty of war. Yet, despite their violent content, in 1947 the strips of *SJTA* were collected in a comic-book, advertised as a product for children in several newspapers. Why did the artist decide to draw a children's story about war? In *SJTA* Zhang Leping managed to merge cartoonist's aim to inform his public about the contemporary social situation with contemporary writers' ideas about children's literature. *SJTA* addressed children in two different ways: on one side, since Sanmao always attracted young readers, *SJTA* was certainly an interesting story for children; on the other side, the little hero also attracted the attention of an adult public on the challenges of educating children in post-war China. In this section, I analyze the pedagogical message of *SJTA*, furthermore, I show how, by

criticizing soldiers and high officials, Zhang Leping reminded his adult public of the importance of children's education for the future of the country.

To understand the relevance of *SJTA* in the field of post-war children's literature, it would be useful to analyze the production and political stance of Chinese for children highlighting the aims they shared with cartoonists like Zhang Leping. During the war, writers of children's stories focused mainly on the deeds of heroic children willing to risk their life for their country. Those young writers who emerged during the war as the new specialists of children's literature – such as Chen Bochui 陳伯吹 (1906-1997) – were also the most active authors of post-war stories for children.<sup>70</sup> One of the most active and influential groups was the left-wing China Association of Writers for Children (*Zhongguo ertong duwu zuozhe xiehui*, 中國兒童讀物作者協會), founded on 9 June 1946 by ten respected educators and writers such as Chen Bochui, Li Chuncai 李楚材 (1905-1998), and Shen Baiying 沈百英 (1897-1992). Between 1946 and 1949, the members of the Association produced several stories, songs, and novels which were published in the most prominent children's magazines.<sup>71</sup> In 1948, a miscellany of their works was printed in a volume entitled *A Selection of Literary Works for Children* (*Ertong wenxue chuanguo xuanji*, 兒童文學創作選集).<sup>72</sup> The contributors stated the aim of their work in the preface to the book: to make their young readers conscious of the contemporary political and social reality of their country. With this statement, the writers of the League connected their work with the political ideas and production of leftist writers active before the war, who saw in a new revolutionary children's literature a tool to educate children about inequality encouraging them to participate in building a more equal society.<sup>73</sup> This idea was not dissimilar to the one proposed by the members of the Shanghai Cartoonists Association, who wished to bring the same sort of knowledge to their adult public. Cartoonists and writers also shared similar means of communication. In one meeting organized in November 1946, the China Association of Writers for Children discussed the use of *lianhuanhua* which, thanks their popularity and accessibility, were considered an effective form

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<sup>70</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 181.

<sup>71</sup> Jian Ping 簡平, *Shanghai shaonian ertong baokan jianshi*, 61.

<sup>72</sup> China Children's Reading Material Authors League ed. (*Zhongguo ertong duwu zuozhe xiehui*, 中國兒童讀物作者協會), *Ertong wenxue chuanguo xuanji* 一九四八兒童文學創作選 [Selection of Work of Children Literature 1948](Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju yongning yinshua, 1949).

<sup>73</sup> See Chapter 1.

for the purposes of mass education.<sup>74</sup> In this perspective, *SJTA* partially fitted the views of the China Association of Writers for Children as to what constituted a perfect children's story. Farquhar claimed that *SJTA* could be considered a product of revolutionary children's literature since it commented upon contemporary issues; it contained educational elements and was sympathetic to the masses, but that it failed to show 'differentiation of class and social inequality.'<sup>75</sup> However, while Zhang Leping's decision to return to recounting the experience of war did not fit the leftist writers' agenda to educate children about contemporary reality, in *SJTA* Zhang Leping did introduce the concept of social inequality into his strips.

After appearing serially in *Shenbao* in 1946, in February 1947 the strips of *SJTA* were collected for the first time in three comic books by Roc Books Press (*Dapeng shubao shechuban*, 大鵬書報社出版). In January 1949, *SJTA* and *Sanmao's Unofficial Biography* were republished by Sifang Publishing House (*Sifang shuju yinxing*, 四方書局印行) (Fig.30). If the *lianhuanhua* format was not enough to demonstrate Zhang Leping's intention to attract a public of children, the advertising campaign promoting the comic book and its preface was clearly aimed at young readers.

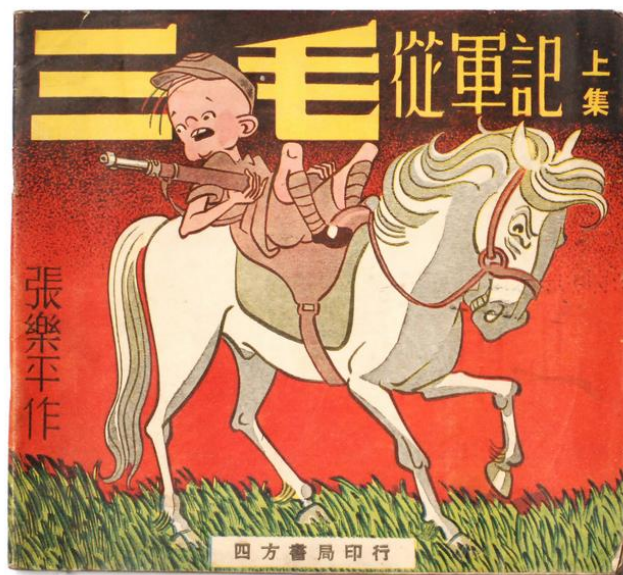


Fig. 30: The cover of the first volume of the comic-book of *Sanmao Joins the Army*, published by Sifang Publishing House (*Sifang shuju yinxing*, 四方書局印行), January 1949.

<sup>74</sup>Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 191.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

The comic books published by Sifang Publishing House were massively advertised in the major newspapers of the time, such as *Shenbao*, *New People Daily* (*Xinminbao*, 新民報) and *The Impartial Daily* (大公報, *Dagongbao*). In these advertisements, children were clearly indicated as the target consumers of the book. For instance, a commercial published in *The Impartial* in January 1949 promoted Zhang Leping's most recent comic books with this catchy slogan: 'For the New Year, Zhang Leping's *San Mao Joins the Army* and *San Mao's Biography* are the best presents for your children' (Fig. 31).<sup>76</sup> This particular advertisement was published on the occasion of the Chinese New Year, but it was only one of many announcements promoting *Sanmao* comic books in 1949. This advertisement, as well as others, followed the advertising techniques already employed for *Sanmao* comics before the war.<sup>77</sup> The name of Sanmao appears in bigger characters at the top and at the bottom of the image, accompanied by several portraits of the little hero. The image of Sanmao riding a horse was actually the one chosen for the cover of the first comic book of *SJTA*. Furthermore, the advertisement reminded the public that the comics were sold in every bookstore and by newspaper vendor, at the price of 28 yuan for *San Mao's Biography* and 48 yuan for *SJTA*

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<sup>76</sup> Published several times on *Dagongbao* during the month of January 1949.

<sup>77</sup> See Chapter 1.



Fig. 31: "Sanmao Joins the Army and Sanmao's Unauthorized Biography are the best New Year presents for your children!". (*Sanmao congjun ji Sanmao waizhuan xinnian zhong song gei xiaopengyou zuihao de liwu*, 三毛從軍記, 三毛外傳新年中送給小朋友最好的禮物). Advertisement for Sanmao comics, *Dagongbao* 7 January 1949.

This advertisement presented *SJTA* as a children's book, but it did not mention the content of the comics and why they would be attractive for children. Conversely, another commercial published on the first page of *New People Daily* in February 1949, besides providing the readers with all the information about the publishing house and prices, also described the content of the book in this way: 'The little hero joins the army, kills enemies and risks his own life! Enjoy the endless anecdotes of the little hero on the battlefield!' (Fig. 32). As we have seen, Sanmao's deeds were not exactly the main subject of the strips, which were actually aimed at showing the cruel side of

war. Nevertheless, these advertisements presented *SJTA* as an entertaining story describing the little hero's astonishing adventures. In showing Sanmao while riding a horse or losing his pants during a battle, these advertisements relied on the most light-hearted side of the comic serial in order to attract possible buyers.

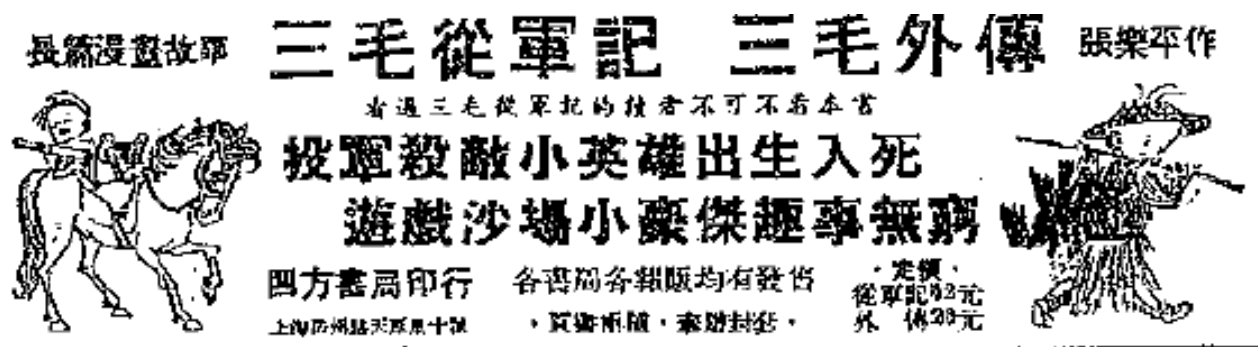


Fig. 32: Advertisement for *San Mao Joins the Army* and *San Mao's Biography*. "The little hero joins the army, kills enemies and risks his own life! Enjoy the endless anecdotes of the little hero on the battlefield!" (*Toujun shadi xiaoyingxiong chushegrusi! youxi shachang, qushiwuqiong!* 投軍殺敵小英雄出生入死! 遊戲沙場...趣事無窮),

*Xinminbao* 新民報, 27 January 1949.

These advertisements were correct in promising action and fun to young readers. The comic serial contained action scenes and other narratives which could attract children's attention, as in the case of some strips based on Sanmao's encounters with dogs, horses, ducks and even fish. Furthermore, it is important to remember that during the Sino-Japanese conflict Chinese children became protagonists and targets of war propaganda, through which they were invited to give their contribution to the war effort. Some of the most popular stories featured as main characters child-heroes ready to sacrifice their life for the cause.<sup>78</sup> Even cartoonists like Zhang Leping fostered this vision of childhood with their propaganda images.<sup>79</sup> Not only was the concept of publishing the story of a child's adventures during the war barely new, but it is also possible to think that with *SJTA* Zhang Leping aimed at arousing children's interest in war. However, in wartime stories, while children often helped adults dispatching messages, spying on enemies and protecting their families, they were not legally conscripted into the army. As we have seen, the

<sup>78</sup> See for instance the story of little Haiwa in *Feather Letters* (*Jimao xin*, 鷄毛信) published for the first time in 1945 just before the end of the war, Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 183.

<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 2.



idea of enrolling his underage hero in the army in *SJTA* allowed Zhang Leping to create an absurd description of the conflict which forms the basis of his criticism of the war. For this reason, it is doubtful that *SJTA* was designed to encourage Chinese children to glorify war. What ideas did Zhang Leping try to put forward to these child readers in his new comic serial?

Once again, the artist's preface – written for the first edition of the *lianhuanhua* of *SJTA* – sheds a light on the message which the artist wanted to communicate to his public. The introduction opens with a description of Sanmao's life before and after the war:

Sanmao is a character of ten years ago, and therefore he should be an adult now. However, I still draw Sanmao in the old fashion, since I think that in these ten years the environment in which he lives has not changed at all. Ten years ago, Sanmao collected garbage and slept on the street. Although his situation has not changed at all, his spirit changed a bit, because he has learnt from adults how to solicit business on the street, how to smoke the butts of American cigarettes, and how to scream: "Hallo!" (*Haluo*, 哈罗!). Since this is Sanmao's situation at the moment, I think I still have a lot to draw, and a lot to write. (...) Over the years, what hurt me the most was the idea that – wittingly or unwittingly – I transformed the naive and pure (*tianzhen weizao*, 天真未鑿) Sanmao into a clown. Although Sanmao has many problems, I don't blame him for them. I draw Sanmao every day, and every day I discover that he is naughty and mischievous, therefore I look forward for the day in which Sanmao's life conditions will improve.<sup>80</sup>

This introduction provides several useful elements for a comprehensive interpretation of the educational purposes *SJTA*. Interestingly, Zhang Leping describes Sanmao as a street-boy collecting garbage and smoking cigarettes. This representation stood in opposition to the fighter-boys which appeared in wartime children's stories. In the introduction, Sanmao serves as a metaphor for the many Chinese children living on the street, which already attracted the attention of artists and leftist film makers before the war.<sup>81</sup> During the conflict, Zhang Leping also showed

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<sup>80</sup> Zhang Leping, preface to the comic book *San Mao Joins the Army*, January 1947. From Zhang Leping, *Zhang Leping: wo de manhua shenghuo*, 45.

<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 1.

how war negatively affected children's life, as for example in the case of some images of *Zhuji after Devastation*. Unfortunately, as appears from Zhang's words, years of warfare worsened the problem of orphans and of children's criminalization, and also exacerbated the despicable behaviours of adults. Adults showed Sanmao how to do business on the street, to smoke and to speak to American soldiers. The child is not to blame for his attitudes, the society he lives in should take responsibility for him. The failure of adults in educating children is clearly stated in *SJTA*, where Sanmao's comrades cannot be considered as models for the child. For instance, in the strips published on 28 May, a soldier spits on the floor despite the banner hanging on the wall clearly stating that 'Spitting on the Floor is Forbidden'. When Sanmao shows him the prohibition notice, the soldier rips the sign off the wall. In the last panel, the little hero is portrayed while spitting on the floor following the bad example of the soldier (Fig. 33). If we interpret this strip in the light of Zhang Leping's words, we will see that the artist is trying to point out that adults are responsible for children's education, but often they are not up to the task.

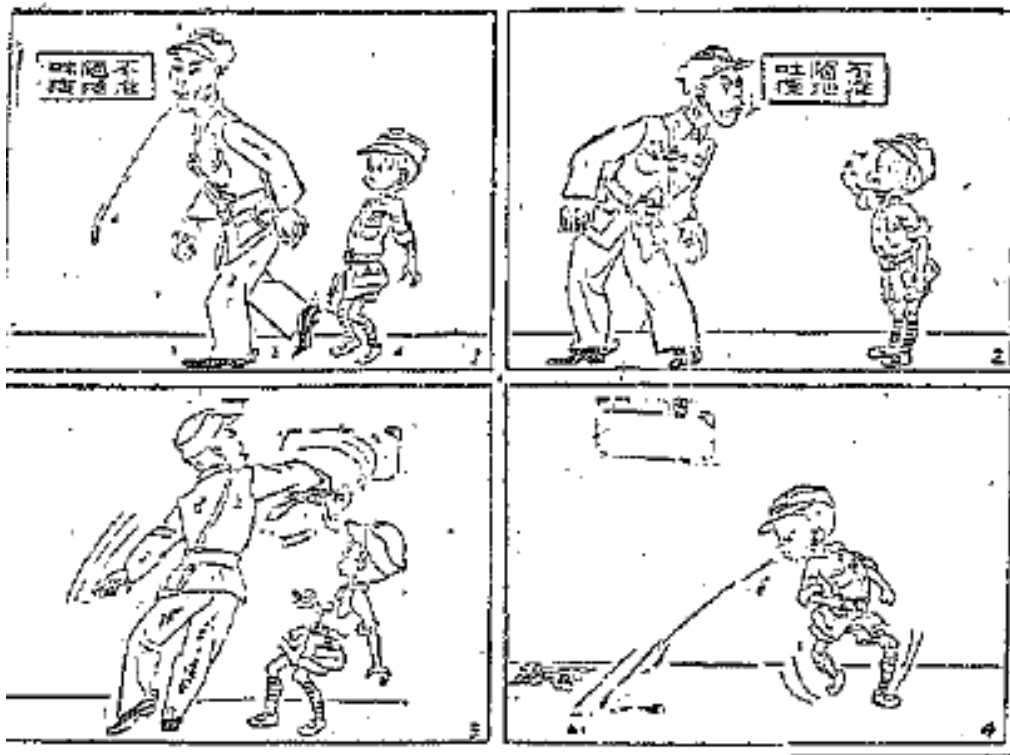


Fig. 33: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 27 May 1946. The board says: 'It's forbidden to spit on the floor'.

On several occasions Sanmao is more disciplined and reasonable than his colleagues, yet he is fast in learning from his adult friends' examples. Even higher officials are not exempt from

shortcomings. In several strips Sanmao is portrayed while serving officials in different mansions, in all these occasions the child is harshly punished for his mistakes. In one strip, Sanmao tries to protect an official from the summer heat waving a big fan. While wiping his soaked forehead, the child accidentally drops few beads of sweat on the official's back provoking a violent reaction from the man, who punishes the unfortunate subordinate with a vicious kick (Fig. 34).

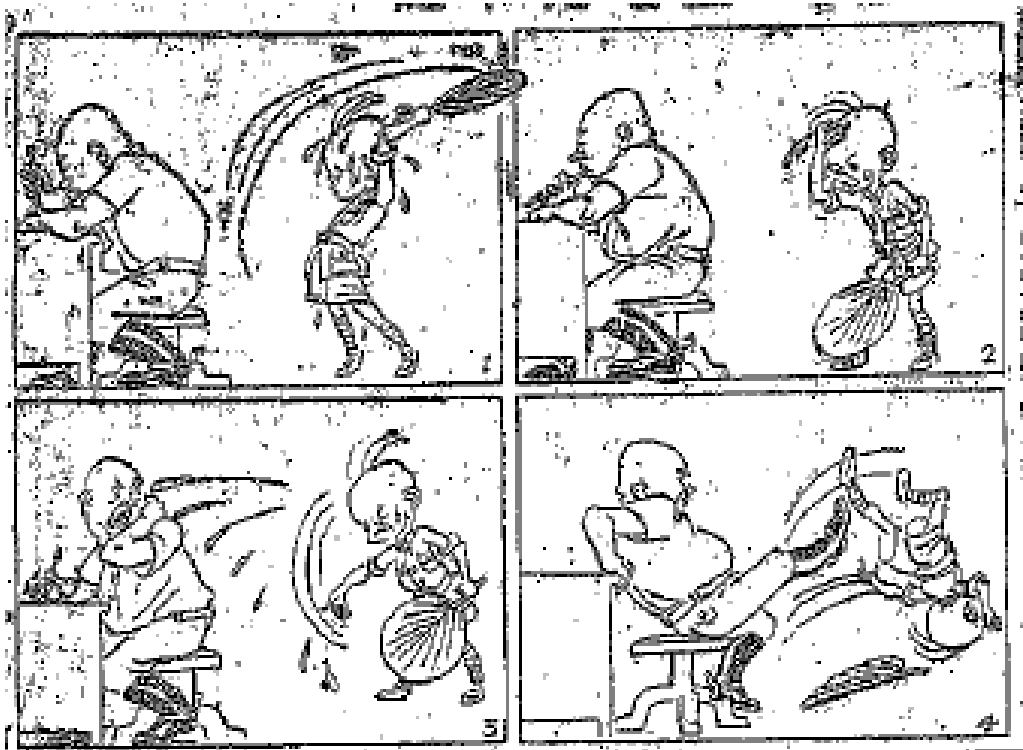


Fig. 34: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 7 August 1946.

This strip, and many other similar ones, denounced the treatment meted out by high officials to their subordinates. Their violent and unjust behaviour may be copied and repeated by new generations. In the second strip of the serial published on 13 May, Sanmao is assigned to the service of an official. His first assignment is to take care of the man's young son. Although the official's son seems to be only a little bit younger than Sanmao, the little hero still has to transport the child around on his shoulders. In the last panel, we see the official and his wife leisurely strolling down the street, while Sanmao follows them carrying their child and their luggage. Ironically, the two posters hanging on the wall quote: 'The rise and fall of the nation concerns everyone' (*Guojia xingwang pifu yuze*, 國家興亡匹夫有責) and 'If you have money, pay out; if you have strength exert yourself' (*Youqian chuqian youli chuli*, 有錢出錢有力出),

underlining how while everybody is supposed to make a contribution for the survival of the country, this contribution often differs from one person to another according to their social status and economic power (Fig. 35).

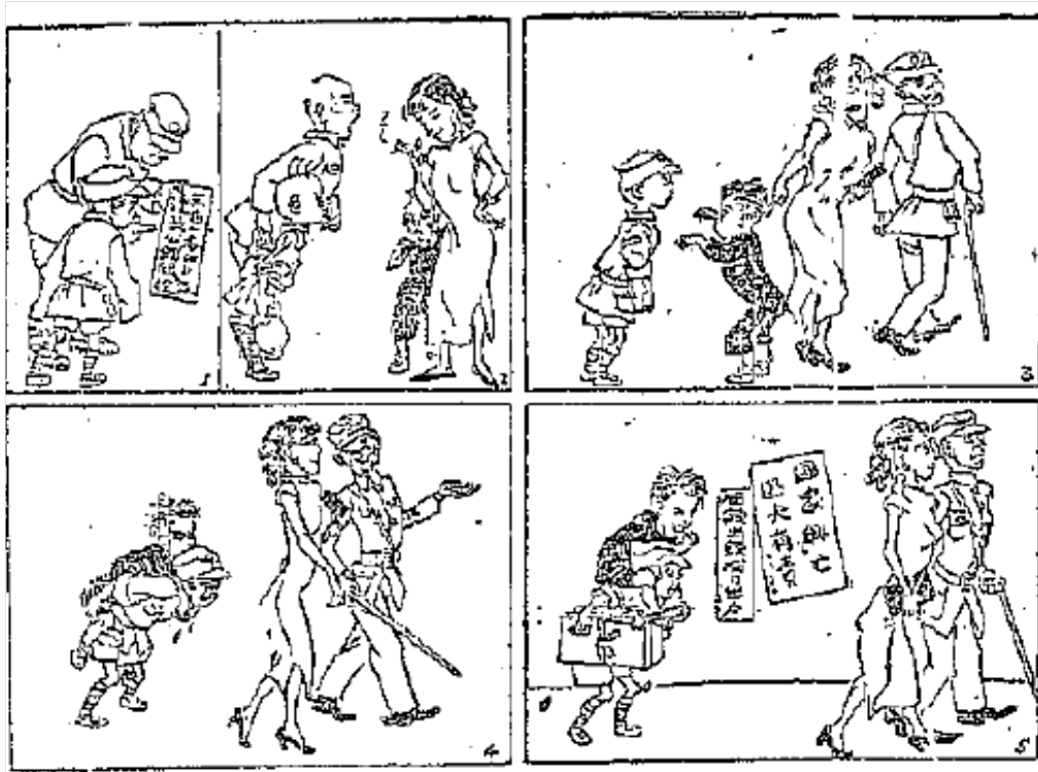


Fig. 35: Zhang Leping. *Sanmao Joins the Army*, *Shenbao*, 13 May 1946.

These strips were fundamental to Farquhar's view concerning the anti-Nationalist stand of *SJTA*. According to Farquhar, the main aim of Zhang Leping was to reveal to his public the greediness of the Nationalist officials, in an attempt to denounce the mismanagement of the Nationalist government in post-war China.<sup>82</sup> Farquhar claimed that the 'bitter edged' humour of the strips allowed Zhang Leping to denounce Chinese officials' greed.<sup>83</sup> Certainly these two strips can be read as critical towards the Nationalist Party, and most probably they conveyed a conventional critique of the behaviour of high-ranking officials. When *SJTA* was published for the first time in Taiwan in 1987, these images and a few similar ones were censored by the Nationalist authorities, worried that these strips could cast the Nationalist Government.<sup>84</sup> Yet, to restrict the analysis of *SJTA* to criticism of a specific political party is reductive. The overfocus on the

<sup>82</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 204.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-205.

<sup>84</sup> Yang Guo, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 34-35.

negative portray of the GMD proves how strong the Communist Party's ideological influence on the interpretation of Zhang Leping' work became after 1949. Once in power the CCP also censured *SJTA*, and when the serial was republished in 1983 for the first time in mainland China after the Liberation, it was strongly modified.<sup>85</sup> The artist did present a negative depiction of military officials in his strips; but this does not necessary demonstrate that the entire comic serial was based on a desire to criticise the Nationalist Government. More than greediness and corruption, what we can see in these strips is how strikingly different the experience of war for common soldiers and high officials was. While soldiers like Sanmao suffer hunger, cold and risk their life in combat, officials live a comfortable life, and can take advantage of their subordinates' work. In this way, Zhang Leping clearly introduced the idea of inequality in *SJTA*.

To make the reader aware of social inequality, however, was only one of the aims of these strips. If we look at these images in the light of Zhang Leping's introduction, we can see that in these images the artist suggests that adults are the cause of Sanmao's improper behaviour. Indeed, the country's future citizens could be ruined by adults, especially those that should serve as their models, as in the case of senior officials. The Nationalist Government, who as we have seen, thought of children as the bearers of the nation's future, was actually a supporter of the idea that children's behaviour could be influenced in a negative manner by those that should be their guides. For instance, while parents were often advised how to bring up healthy, patriotic children, Colette Plum pointed out that during the war the GMD believed that parents could be unreliable transmitters of modern culture to their offspring.<sup>86</sup> The establishment of semi-militarized associations like the Boy Scouts were one of the answers that the Nationalist Party found to the necessity of bringing up Chinese children able to defend their country from foreign menace. However, in *SJTA* Zhang Leping accused public figures – like military officials – of being negative examples for children. In particular, while the Nationalist Party focused on the upbringing of modern citizens, in *SJTA* abuse of power and unequal treatment were the most recurrent themes.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>86</sup> For parents as educators see Helen M. Schneider, *Keeping the Nation's House*, 57-80. On orphans see Colette Plum, "Orphans in the Family," 186-208.

The subject of inequality among Chinese citizens also became widespread in the contemporary work of other cartoonists. Zhang Leping's attack on the higher echelons of the Chinese Army is reminiscent of several cartoons produced in the same years, in which Chinese citizens appear oppressed by rich and powerful men.<sup>87</sup> Zhang Leping concentrated on the idea that children, the next generation of Chinese citizens, those that the Nationalists kept celebrating as the future masters of the nation, were particularly damaged by the effects of social inequality, as shown in the strip above. As the May Fourth intellectuals had called for the end of the dissemination of Confucian ideas among the young generations, similarly Zhang Leping accused adults of bringing up their children with misleading ideas about their position in society. In particular, in *SJTA* he showed how those in power were expected to be models for children, yet they seemed to exploit their power in order to exacerbate social inequality. Differences in wealth, social position and political power were transmitted from generation to generation, leaving children like Sanmao always vulnerable.

The concept of social inequality among children was pushed further in Zhang Leping's later work *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*, where this subject became the main motif of the story, as shown in one advertisement for the new comic serial. Sanmao walks with an expression of resignation on his face carrying a small child on his back and with another walking by his side. The two children are well dressed, while Sanmao walks barefoot in badly darned pants (Fig.33). This image recalls of the strip in *SJTA* commented on above, where the little hero is obliged to carry a wealthier child on his back, showing how in his next work Zhang Leping elaborated on some concepts he put forward in *SJTA*.

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<sup>87</sup> See for instance Ding Cong's cartoons plate for Hung, "The Fuming Image," plate 4.



Fig. 36: Commercial for the second volume of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*, *Dagongbao*, April 1949.





## CHAPTER 4: THE POLITICS OF CHILDREN'S WELFARE IN THE YEARS OF THE CIVIL WAR: THE WANDERING LIFE OF SANMAO (1947-1950)

In March 1949, Song Qingling – the influential widow of Sun Yat-sen – organized an exhibition entirely dedicated to Sanmao at the prestigious headquarters of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (*Waibo huifeng yinhang* 外灘匯豐銀行) on the Bund. The 'Exhibition of Sanmao Original Works' (*Sanmao yuanzuo zhanlanhui*, 三毛原作展覽會) was an opportunity to invite the bank's shareholders to raise money for institutions specializing in helping poor children in China. During the official opening, Song Qingling asked Zhang Leping to come to her side, and she introduced him to the public with laudatory words: 'I have to thank Mr. Zhang for his work for these vagrant children; all the Sanmao of China will remember you.' Deeply moved, the cartoonist answered with a simple 'It's my duty'.<sup>1</sup> Song Qingling's decision to employ Zhang Leping's cartoon hero for her fund-raising activities originated from the enormous popularity of the artist's new comic serial *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*, published in the influential newspaper *Dagongbao* between 15 June 1947 and 4 April 1949.<sup>2</sup> The fame of this comic serial was not short-lived, on the contrary it was destined to become one of the most popular and long-lasting classics of Chinese children's literature. In his new work, the artist described the life of his little hero as a street urchin in Shanghai during the troubled years of the Civil War, creating a grim description of contemporary Chinese society and economy.

*The Wandering Life* has been commonly discussed in historiography, both in the context of contemporary revolutionary children's literature and in the context of leftist cartoonists' production of images aimed at criticizing the Nationalist Party.<sup>3</sup> Historian of children's literature Mary Ann Farquhar has claimed that in *The Wandering Life* Zhang Leping ceased to focus on the fight against the Japanese, in order to concentrate on corrupt and privileged elites, introducing a

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<sup>1</sup>For more information about this event see the original website of the History of the People's Republic of China, in the article entitled "Song Qingling wei Sanmao fuzi zhuzhen" 宋慶齡為三毛父子助陣 [Song Qingling's support for Sanmao's Father], [http://www.hprc.org.cn/gsyj/rws/qtgild/201012/t20101207\\_116106\\_1.html](http://www.hprc.org.cn/gsyj/rws/qtgild/201012/t20101207_116106_1.html). Last access :3 April 2014. Song Qingling wrote about Sanmao also to one of her American friends, see Song Qingling 宋慶齡, *Song Qingling shuxin ji* 宋慶齡書信集 [Collected Letters of Song Qingling] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2004), 154.

<sup>2</sup> These dates are valid for the Shanghai edition of *Dagong bao*. The Tianjin edition of the newspaper started publishing the same strips on 16 March 1948 ; while in Hong Kong the newspaper published the serial from 15 April 1948. From Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 206-212. Hung, "The Fuming Image," 128-129.

clear differentiation of class in his cartoons. While Farquhar focused on the political message of Zhang Leping's strips, historians of children's literature Barbara Rosen, Norman Bock and Ching Lan-Jen explained how through the image of the orphan Sanmao *The Wandering Life* invited children to reflect and criticize adults and parents' behaviour, thus questioning the culture of respect for one's elders or for arbitrary public authority. Chang-tai Hung briefly analyzed *The Wandering Life* in the broader context of the cartoon production of the Civil War years, concluding that in his strip Zhang Leping aimed to present to his readers how contemporary politics had led to a process of disintegration in Chinese society.<sup>4</sup> Although valid, these interpretations are not sufficient to explain the content, political significance and popularity of Zhang Leping's work. *The Wandering Life* – as well as the story of its production – contained several features which made this comic serial a unique piece of political art hardly comparable with any other contemporary graphic production.

In this chapter, I discuss the philanthropic, educational and political messages of *The Wandering Life*, highlighting how Zhang Leping portrayed the Nationalist authorities' neglect for children's welfare. Zhang Leping was not the only personality in Shanghai focusing on the problem of children's welfare as a weapon for denouncing political mismanagement. On the contrary, this theme was picked up by several popular personalities – such as Song Qingling – who contributed in shaping the political message of Zhang's strips. Writers, newspaper editors, political activists, educators, and film makers from different political backgrounds all contributed in popularizing the contents and messages of *The Wandering Life* outside the comic strip medium. As we will see, the image of the orphan Sanmao was broadcast, discussed and transformed through different media, leading to a progressive radicalization of Zhang Leping's political thought and of the content of *The Wandering Life*, particularly evident in the homonymous movie produced in 1949.

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<sup>4</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 206-212. Rosen, Bock and Ching, "The Wandering Life of Sanmao," *Children's Literature*, Vol. 15 (1987): 120-138. Hung, "The Fuming Image," 128-129.

## CIVIL WAR, SHANGHAI AND THE ORIGINS OF *THE WANDERING LIFE OF SANMAO*

'One night I was coming back home late, it was mind-numbingly cold, and the streets were completely silent. In an alley at distance, I saw three children with red faces sitting together. As I walked closer, I realized that they were three refugee children (*nantong*, 難童) sitting around some little cans and a fire. The bone-piercing wind from the north was blowing, it was snowing incessantly. I stood in front of them as if in a trance for a long time. I knew they couldn't make it through the night. I wished them good luck, and I hoped that they really could survive that cold night (...). The day after, I came back to the same alley, and I discovered that two out of the three children I saw the night before had frozen to death.'<sup>5</sup>

With these words, Zhang Leping described his meeting with a group of homeless children in Shanghai in the winter of 1947. Certainly, this portrayal of childhood in the metropolis differed greatly from the 1930s descriptions of Shanghai as a modern, glamorous and flourishing economic center. According to Zhang Leping, the dramatic vision of children's suffering on the street played a pivotal role in his decision to draw a comic serial based on the adventures of homeless Sanmao. However, *The Wandering Life* represented much more than the troubled story of an orphan, since through the little hero's experience the author managed to describe the issues and problems of many other Shanghai residents. To understand the emergence of *The Wandering Life*, it is necessary to understand the historical background in which this comic was produced, the problems of inflation, hunger and general social breakdown afflicting Shanghai society, and the political agenda of *Dagongbao*, the newspaper which published Zhang Leping's strips.

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the War of Resistance was followed by years of harsh civil conflict between the Nationalists and the Communists.<sup>6</sup> The struggle for military superiority was certainly the most apparent effect of the political conflict between Nationalists and Communists. The Civil War had also significant and longlasting effects on the daily lives of Chinese civilians. During the four years of war, almost six million people lost their lives as a

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<sup>5</sup> Feng Chuying, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed description of the military fight between the GMD and the CCP see Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

result not only of military actions, but also due to famine and economic disruption. In the areas controlled by the Nationalists, rampant inflation, massive corruption, and social mismanagement contributed to the final defeat of the GMD.<sup>7</sup>

Although Shanghai was spared massive military action till May 1949, the metropolis suffered from all the problems which afflicted the rest of the country. One of the major issues was the endemic corruption among government officials who came back from Chongqing after the Japanese defeat in 1945. Although the Nationalist administration established several committees in order to guarantee a fair and unproblematic takeover of Shanghai, corruption and illegal practices were widespread. Pepper claimed that officials and merchants returning from the wartime capital Chongqing took advantage of the huge availability of Chinese Government currency to buy properties for small sums of money.<sup>8</sup> The profiteers also damaged factories, dismantling the machinery or selling raw materials to gain a quick profit.<sup>9</sup> Corruption was also one of the causes of Shanghai's economic crisis, which the Nationalist government proved unable to solve. Speculation, failure to implement economic reforms and closure of most of the industrial facilities brought the city to the verge of economic collapse. The population had to deal with hyperinflation, rising unemployment and constant conditions of uncertainty. The city administration was not able to provide all the unemployed citizens with economic assistance.<sup>10</sup>

The economic hardship caused frustration and suspicion among the Shanghainese. First of all, the population stopped trusting in the actions of the Nationalist Government, accusing the officials of corruption, mismanagement and incompetence. When the Civil War started in 1946, the frustration of the population gave rise to several protests led by students complaining about the beginning of a new war, widespread hunger and also against the GMD connection with the American military.<sup>11</sup> Although officials claimed that those protests were infiltrated by underground members of the CCP, general dissatisfaction with the Nationalists' mismanagement lay at the base of the protests.

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<sup>7</sup> Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: the Political Struggle, 1945-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-58.

In addition to economic hardship, Shanghai citizens had to deal also with rampant social problems. During and after the War of Resistance, the city absorbed a huge number of refugees, who were often destined to live in shantytowns or on the street. Many of them became beggars, or engaged in semi-criminal activities.<sup>12</sup> The international organization United Nation Relief and Rehabilitation (UNRRA) provided China with financial help for refugees and reconstruction, but the funds did not always reach the people in need.<sup>13</sup> In her book *Guilty of Indigence*, Janet Chen claimed that by 1948, there were fifteen million refugees in China, of whom around one million had fled to Shanghai especially from the Subei area, worsening the already severe humanitarian emergency.<sup>14</sup> In particular, due to the widespread poverty, the number of petty crimes increased drastically in the city, raising concern among the populations. Incapable of handling the vast number of citizens living in misery, the municipal government turned to criminalization in order to keep people off the street, though without achieving great success.<sup>15</sup>

Orphan children wandering around the city were one of the most pressing social issues. In Chinese, *gu'er* 孤兒 is the general term to indicate orphans, but during and after the War of Resistance newspapers started to call those children who had lost their parents during the war or that had to flee their home 'refugee children' (*nantong*, 難童). Another category of orphans were the 'wandering children', or 'street urchins' (*liulang ertong*, 流浪兒童), a term which described those children living on the streets committing petty crimes, often in bands.<sup>16</sup> Street urchins were not always orphans, their parents might be alive, but they were homeless and lived on their wits. As we have seen in the previous chapter, homeless children had already become a common sight in China already during the War of Resistance, to the extent that welfare of orphans became one of the most important humanitarian issues for the Nationalist Government. The problem of homeless children was not new; as we saw in chapter one, half-criminalized orphans living on

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<sup>12</sup> Janet Y Chen, *Guilty of Indigence: The Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 174.

<sup>13</sup> Rana Mitter, "Imperialism Transnationalism and the Reconstruction of Post- War China: UNRRA in China 1944-1947," *Past and Present* 2013, Supplement 8.

<sup>14</sup> Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*, 174.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>16</sup> Colette Plum, "Lost Childhoods in New China: Child-Citizens-Workers at War: 1937-1945," *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 11, (2013): 244.

the streets in Shanghai had already appeared in several left-wing films in the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> The war with Japan created at least two million orphans in China, a problem that the Nationalist government tried to contain by founding wartime children's homes, which, however, did not succeed in solving the humanitarian crisis.<sup>18</sup> The Nationalist government did attempt to resolve the pressing social problem of refugee children and homeless children, but military expenses, hyperinflation and general economic collapse prevented the authorities from realizing a workable relief plan. According to social worker Liu Dewei 劉德偉, in 1947 Shanghai hosted fifty operating orphanages (*gu'eryuan*, 孤兒院), one foundling hospital (*yuyingtang*, 育嬰堂), one institution for problematic children (*xingweiwenti ertongyuan*, 行為問題兒童院) one hospital for disabled children (*shangcan ertongyua*, 傷殘兒童院) and three nurseries (*tuo'ersuo*, 托兒所).<sup>19</sup> There were also orphanages run by Western missionaries, but they were also unable to solve the problem.<sup>20</sup> In fact, these institutions could not house all the indigent children of the city. Even those youngsters lucky enough to enter one of these shelters faced a tough life. In a letter directed to the President of the Social Welfare Bureau of Shanghai city government, a British social worker helping Chinese orphans in Shanghai asked the authorities for help. Referring to a shelter for orphans based between Kaoyang Lan and Hailasun Lan, she described to the authorities the horrible conditions in which children were living:

I have learned from Mr Shen and Mr. Nee (who supervise this place) that they were ordered to give only four ounces of rice and two of hot water daily to the children under 12 years of age. There are twelve of these unfortunate starving little boys in this place. Yet the little boys are obliged to work from morning to dark pasting match-boxes. (...) Most of them have no socks, some have no shoes even; they work in a shed with holes instead of windows, shivering with cold.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>18</sup> Colette Plum, "Unlikely Heirs"

<sup>19</sup> Liu Dewei. *Yi li Zhenzhu de Gushi* 一粒珍珠的故事 [The Story of a Pearl] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2006) <http://www.mjlsh.net/book.aspx?cid=2&tid=2&pid=737>. Last access on 5 May 2014.

<sup>20</sup> *Shanghai gaikuang si yue* 1949 上海概況, 1949 年 4 月 [The general situation of Shanghai, April 1949.], 584.

<sup>21</sup> Shanghai Municipal Archive: Q6-9-434. "Shanghai shehuiju guanyu jiuji nantong an" 上海市社會局關於救濟難童案 [Shanghai municipality bureau of social affairs file on the relieve of refugee children], 27 November 1947.

Those homeless children who could not (or did not want to) enter one of these institutions lived a hand-to-mouth existence on the street. Photographer Sam Tata captured the life of street urchins in several of his pictures of 1949 Shanghai.<sup>22</sup> These poorly clothed children were portrayed while begging, eating, and sleeping on the street. During and after the war Shanghai residents became increasingly aware of the tendency of these homeless children to resort to petty crime to survive. Corpses of children abandoned on the streets were a quite common sight in Shanghai during the Civil War.<sup>23</sup>

Zhang Leping had shown an interest in the subject already in the 1930s but now decided to transform his Sanmao into a street urchin. In *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*, Zhang Leping touched on various problems afflicting Shanghai's citizens, with a specific focus on children's welfare. His project for a comic serial based on the adventures of homeless Sanmao on the streets of Shanghai became reality when *Dagongbao*'s editor Wang Yunsheng asked him to publish in the newspaper a story similar to *Sanmao Joins the Army*.<sup>24</sup> Zhang Leping prepared some sketches, which he presented to the writer Chen Bochui, a member of the already mentioned China Association of Writers for Children and at the time the editor of *Dagongbao*'s periodical for children *Children Supplement* (*Ertong Fukan*, 兒童副刊). Satisfied with outline and content of the comic, the editor of the newspaper decided to approve the publication of the strips, which began in June 1947.<sup>25</sup>

The story of the production and reception of *The Wandering Life* is connected with the story of *Dagongbao*, a name which can be translated in English as 'Impartial Daily', and which had a reputation for political impartiality. The newspaper, bought by banker Wu Dingchang 吳鼎昌 (1884-1950) in 1926, was managed by Hu Zhengzhi 衡政之 (1889-1949) and editor-in-chief Zhang Jiluan 張季鸞 (1888-1941). These three came from very different political backgrounds,

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<sup>22</sup> Ian McLachlan and Sam Tata, *Shanghai 1949: the End of an Era* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> Christian Henriot, "Invisible Deaths, Silent Deaths: Bodies without Masters in Republican Shanghai," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2009): 407-437.

<sup>24</sup> For more information on the origins of *Dagong bao* see: Sophia Wang, "The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of the *Dagong bao* in Republican China," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Summer, 1994): 216-241. See also: Stephen R. MacKinnon, "Toward a History of Chinese Press in the Republican Period," *Modern China*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Jan., 1997): 3-32.

<sup>25</sup> Jian Ping, *Shanghai shaonian ertong baokan jianshi*, 61-62.

but they shared the same ideas about the way in which their newspaper was supposed to be run. *Dagongbao* was based on the concept of non-partisanship, which meant that the paper aimed at expressing public opinion without following a specific political agenda. To achieve this aim, Wu, Hu and Zhang did not accept any financial support from any political party. Furthermore, they avoided hiring journalists with political affiliations, especially with the GMD. The impartiality of the journal became quite clear in the years of the war against Japan, when *Dagongbao* managed to report on both Nationalist and Communist areas, never failing to criticize both parties when needed. The newspaper could publish articles openly critical of the Nationalist party because of editor-chief Zhang Jiluan's patron-client tie with Chiang Kai-shek. The Generalissimo maintained friendly contact with Zhang, believing that the criticism of *Dagongbao* towards his party served to release social tension.<sup>26</sup> But if Chiang Kai-shek did not really need *Dagongbao* for the survival of his government, certainly the newspaper needed the support of the GMD in order to be able to operate in China.<sup>27</sup>

The situation changed after Zhang Jiluan's death in December 1941, when Wang Yunsheng took over his position as editor-in-chief. At the end of the War of Resistance, the newspaper published articles critical towards both the GMD and the CCP. However, during the Civil War relations between Wang Yunsheng and the Nationalist party progressively worsened, to the point that the Nationalists imposed censorship on several articles criticizing the GMD. For instance, in June 1947 (the same month as *The Wandering Life* debut) eight newspaper reporters were arrested in Chongqing for instigating antigovernment protests among students.<sup>28</sup> Between 1945 and 1949 on several occasions *Dagongbao* denounced the criminal behavior of the elite, becoming one of the most outspoken and critical newspapers in China. *Dagongbao* became increasingly more critical towards the Nationalist authorities, and during the Civil War there were at least three Communist journalists working for the newspaper who were also the main authors of articles undermining the GMD. The connection of the newspaper, and especially of editor Wang Yunsheng with the CPP became increasingly more evident in the last months before the victory of the Communists.

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<sup>26</sup> Wang, "The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes," 233.

<sup>27</sup> Yang Kuisong 楊奎鬆 ed., *Renbuzhu de "Guanhuai": 1949 nian qianhou de shusheng yu zhengzhi* 忍不住的"關懷" 1949年前後的書生與政治 [An unbearable 'Concern': Intellectuals and Politics before and after 1949] (Guilin: Guanxi shifang daxue chubanshe, 2013). 96-97.

<sup>28</sup> Wang, "The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes," 237.



*Dagongbao* remained very popular after the War of Resistance reaching the circulation of 150,000 copies in Shanghai alone.<sup>29</sup> *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* contributed to the success of the newspaper, to the point that a few months after the first appearance of this serial, a journalist of the Chengdu-based *The Newest News Fortnightly* (*Xinxin Xinwen Banyuekan*, 新新新聞半月刊) claimed that thanks to the adventures of the little hero the number of *Dagongbao* readers had increased considerably.<sup>30</sup>

The content of *The Wandering Life* was connected with the socio-political situation of Shanghai; furthermore, the strips also supported the political agenda of *Dagongbao*, which became progressively more critical towards the Nationalist government. Zhang Leping's strips reflected *Dagongbao*'s critical view of the government; but it also developed several of the ideas that the artist had already expressed in his previous comic serials.

### THE MAIN THEMES OF *THE WANDERING LIFE*: ECONOMIC CRISIS, WELFARE, SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND THEIR POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

What can be said of the plot of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*? In drawing his comic, Zhang drew inspiration from movies about orphans so fashionable during the 1930s, and whose popularity he had contributed to. According to the artist's wife Ping Chuyin, Zhang Leping based *The Wandering Life* on the personal stories of real orphans. Eager to know more about the life of Shanghai street urchins, Zhang Leping claimed that he made friends with some of the children living in Zhengjia Muqiao 鄭家木橋, one of the poorest areas of Shanghai.<sup>31</sup> In particular, Zhengjia Muqiao was renowned in Shanghai for attracting an impressive number of beggars and vagrants, and for this reason it was nicknamed 'Zhengjia Muqiao Beggars Area' (*Zhengjia Muqiao xiaobeisan*, 鄭家木橋小癩三) or 'Beggars kingdom' (*Qigai wangguo*, 乞丐王國). Several homeless children tried to make a living there begging, pushing rickshaw across the bridge (*tuiqiaotou*, 推橋頭) and eating the leftovers thrown out by restaurants (*qinlengfan*, 搶冷飯).

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 216-241.

<sup>30</sup> Simao 四毛 "Sanmao liulang ji zuozhe Zhnag Leping shi zenmeyang de yi ge ren" 三毛流浪記作者張樂平是怎樣一個人 [What kind of man is Zhang Leping, the author of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* ], *The Newest News Fortnightly* (*Xinxin Xinwen Banyuekan*, 新新新聞半月刊), 1947, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 16.

According to the artist's wife, Zhang Leping had to dress up in old clothes in order to approach the homeless children, who wouldn't have spoken with a well-dressed adult. He then transformed their stories into the adventures of Sanmao. Most probably, Zhang Leping did speak with some of the street urchins living in Shanghai, but *The Wandering Life* also shared themes and plots with pre-war films such as *Lost Lambs* and *Little Orphan Girl*.<sup>32</sup> The movie director of *Lost Lambs* also declared that he spent some time speaking with orphan children living on the streets in order to make his film more realistic.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Zhang Leping admitted adding to the story line some episodes inspired from his experience as an apprentice in his early years in Shanghai.<sup>34</sup>

The comic serial started where *Sanmao Joins the Army* finished; the child is alone in the countryside without food or shelter. After spending a short time with a fisherman, the child heads to Shanghai in the hopes of a better life. Sanmao's choice reflected the attitude of hundreds of thousands of refugees, who after the war moved to the city. Once there, he finds out that Shanghai is not an easy place for poor orphans. He tries to earn money selling newspapers, cleaning shoes, working as an apprentice and pulling rickshaws. At a certain point, he is adopted by a wealthy family, and he is able to enjoy a more comfortable life living with them. Unfortunately, the family loses their house in a fire, and the orphan must leave them. Back on the street, he joins a group of refugees, who treat him like a son, but who cannot guarantee him food. Sanmao loses contact with them after being unjustly imprisoned for stealing some food. Lonely, hungry and desperate, the child becomes an easy prey for criminals, who try to exploit him for illegal activities. Being too honest for these criminal activities, Sanmao leaves the group the thieves, and comes back to the street. The comic doesn't provide the orphan with a happy ending, but only with uncertainty about the future.

The plot of *The Wandering Life* was not particularly original; its power came from the precise construction of every single strip, which could be read as single meaningful units. The strips were carefully constructed so that they would also retain their meaning also when extrapolated from the general story-line. Zhang Leping's comic serial raised several issues and served multiple aims. It commented upon society's ruthlessness, on the condition of welfare in

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<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>33</sup> Xu, "Save the Children," 142.

<sup>34</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 16.

Shanghai, and it criticized the growing inequality among Chinese citizens. Through his strips, Zhang Leping highlighted the demoralization of contemporary society, caused mostly by the worsening living conditions of the population and by the authorities' inability to deal with the social crisis. While to discuss all the strips would be impossible, for a better understanding of the complexity and multiple aims of *The Wandering Life*, I highlight the main themes proposed in it, showing how in this serial Zhang Leping mixed topics typical of leftist cultural production with his own vision of the contemporary sociopolitical situation.

### **Social Distress and Economic Crisis in Shanghai.**

In this section, I analyze how in *The Wandering Life*, the cartoonist managed to merge Sanmao's story with a vivid description of contemporary Shanghai, creating a story to which his readers could relate. While the life of homeless children was the main topic of the strips, Zhang Leping also highlighted problems which Sanmao shared with the other Shanghai residents, creating a connection between the little hero and his readers' daily life. Zhang Leping's strips deal with several problems: hunger, inflation, and the lack of welfare institutions. These issues touched not only orphans, but also other citizens. For instance, throughout the entire comic serial, one of the main problems which afflicted Sanmao was hunger, a subject introduced at the very beginning of the serial, when the child moves to the metropolis. Shanghai appears for the first time in the strip 'Dreaming of an easy fortune' (*Taojin yimeng*, 淘金一夢), where the child observes the city's skyline, hoping to find food and shelter, as we can see from his thoughts revealed through a speech-balloon. Sadly, once in Shanghai, the child discovers that the situation is not as simple as he expected. Instead of the long-craved easily obtained food, the little hero finds out that the city streets are occupied by protesters fighting against the police (Fig. 1). Although Zhang Leping decided not to show the slogan written on the demonstrators' banner, the character *fan* 反 'anti' which appear on the sign reveals the nature of the event: the strip refers to the Anti-Hunger, Anti Civil War Movement (*fan'e* 反餓) protests which took place in Shanghai between 1947 and 1948.<sup>35</sup> In this strip, Zhang Leping first introduced Shanghai as a city of hope, but soon he turns the situation upside down, showing also how city dwellers suffer food shortages, causing protests among the population. As always in Zhang Leping's work, the dour content of the strip was not

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<sup>35</sup> Pepper, *The Civil War in China*, 58-78.

devoid of humorous overtones. Despite the unhappy circumstances, the change in Sanmao's hopeful face from the first panel to his surprise expression in the last scene are certainly makes us laugh. This strip set the tone for the story: firstly, it connected Sanmao's experience with the contemporary reality of Shanghai, linking the experience of flesh and blood children with the adventures of the fictional character; secondly, it introduced the city as a place of social upheaval, a motif which the artist constantly developed in the story. Thanks to this strip, Zhang Leping managed to transform Sanmao from a fictional character to an active commentator of contemporary Chinese society.



Fig 1: Zhang Leping. 'Dreaming of an Easy Fortune' (*Taojin yimeng*, 淘金一夢), *Dagongbao*, 27 March 1948.

By mentioning the Anti-Hunger Anti Civil War Movement, the strip 'Dreaming of an easy fortune' publicized the problem of food costs and food supply in Shanghai. During the Second Sino-Japanese War the price of rice constantly increased in the city, creating appalling financial troubles to the population. There were two main reasons for the rise in prices: economic factors and a deliberate political struggle between the political authorities in the city.<sup>36</sup> The situation did

<sup>36</sup> Christian Henriot. "Rice, Power and People: The Politics of Food Supply in Wartime Shanghai (1937-1945)," *Twentieth Century China*, Vol.26, No. 1 (November, 2000): 41-84.

not improve after 1945. During the Civil War China went through a period of severe economic hardship. Although the Nationalist government tried to freeze the cost of living index, prices continued to rise. In Shanghai the price of rice rose 20 percent between 4-8 May, provoking an outbreak of rioting in the city.<sup>37</sup> High prices and food shortages were a problem for both the urban poor the petty urbanities, such as workers, university students and teachers.<sup>38</sup> In *The Wandering Life*, Sanmao often looks for food, or even tries to find alternative sources of nourishment, such as tree bark or grass.<sup>39</sup> Zhang Leping addressed the problem of inflation directly. During the Civil War hyperinflation was caused mainly by the excessive expenditure of the Nationalist Government for military purposes, and was a direct result of the increase of currency in circulation in the country.<sup>40</sup> The rise in prices – especially of foodstuffs such as rice – created serious difficulties for the population. In the strip 'Prices Rise all the time' (*Suishi zhangjia*, 隨時漲價), Sanmao goes to buy some rice with the money donated by his poor step-mother. Arriving at the rice stall, he discovers that the price has risen to 300.000 yuan. He comes back home asking for some more money, but once back in the shop he finds out that now the same amount of rice costs 400.000 yuan (Fig. 2).

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<sup>37</sup> Pepper, *The Civil War in China*, 58. The problem of inflation, food shortages and consequent riots found its origin already in the late 1930s. For more information and precise economic details see: Robert W. Barnett, "Starvation, Boom and Blockade in Shanghai," *Far Eastern Survey* 9, no. 9 (April 24, 1940): 97-103. See also: Christian Henriot, "Rice, Power and People," 41-48.

<sup>38</sup> Pepper, *The Civil War in China*, 58-60. About social workers see Nara Dillon, "Middlemen in the Chinese Welfare State: The Role of Philanthropists in Refugees Relief in Wartime Shanghai," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (January 2011): 33.

<sup>39</sup> See for instance the strip: 'People are not grass and Trees' (*Renfei caomu*, 人非草木).

<sup>40</sup> Ji Zhaojin, *A History of Modern Shanghai Banking: the Rise and Decline of China's Finance Capitalism* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 228.



Fig. 2: Zhang Leping. 'Prices Rise all the time' (*Suishi zhangjia*, 隨時漲價), *Dagongbao* (Tianjin Version), 6 August 1948.

The problem of hyperinflation appeared also in a strip entitled 'Rushing to collect *fabi*' (*Qiang she fabi*, 搶拾法幣), where Sanmao and one of his orphan friends run to pick up a lost wallet from the ground. Instead of being happy with the find, in the third panel the two appear puzzled and disappointed, because the wallet contains *fabi*, a currency with no value, since it was substituted in August 1948 with the 'gold yuan' (*Jinyuan qua*, 金圓券) (Fig. 3).<sup>41</sup> There is also another possible explanation for the strange behaviour of the two children. This strip could have been inspired by a popular joke circulating at the time, according to which not even beggars were interested in banknotes of less than one thousand Chinese dollars.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>42</sup> Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*, 175.

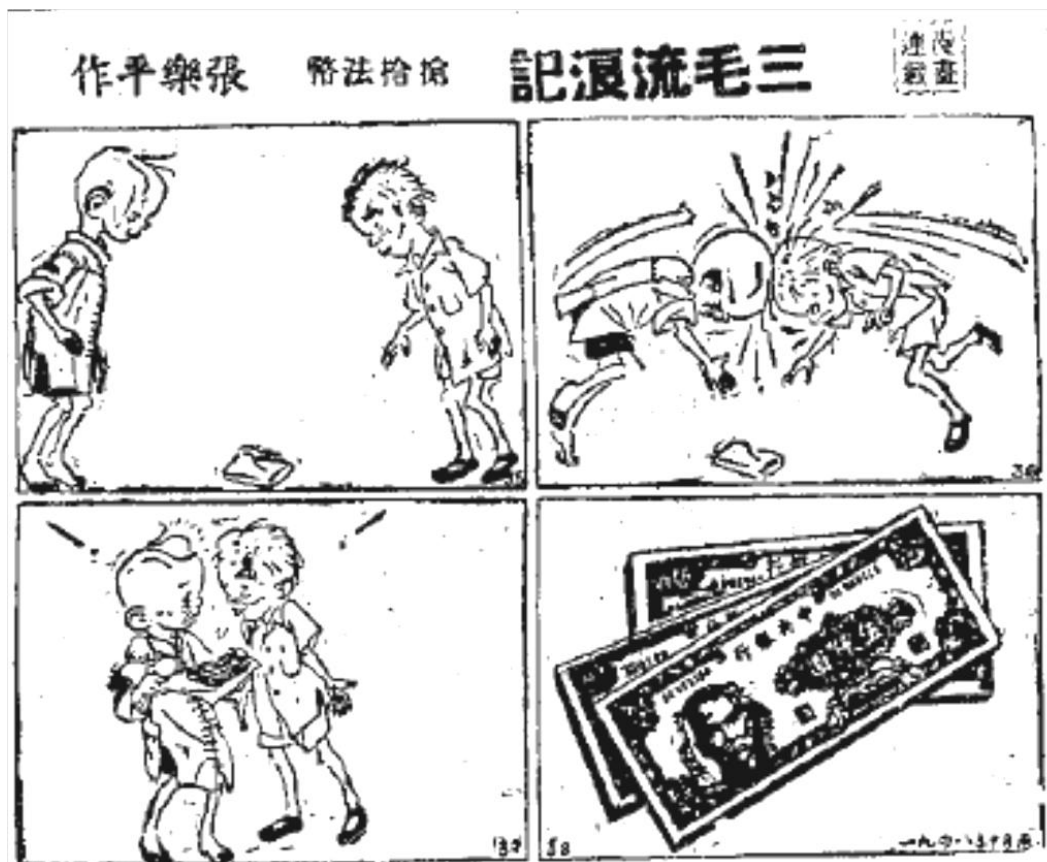


Fig. 3: Zhang Leping. 'Rushing to collect *fabi*' (*Qiang she fabi* 搶拾法幣), *Dagongbao* (Tianjin Version), 23 October 1948.

Although hunger, inflation and lack of welfare hit the most destitute people of Shanghai especially hard; all the city's residents suffered the hardship caused by the economic and political crisis. The petty urbanities also experienced the consequences of the economic crisis. Professors, university students, bank clerks and department store employees lost their jobs, while unemployment became rampant even among the educated young people.<sup>43</sup> This situation of general distress appeared in *The Wandering Life*, for example in the strip 'Not managing to buy' (*Meiyou maida*, 沒有買到) (Fig. 4), where Sanmao is ordered by a boss of a gang he is working for to stand in a long queue of people waiting to buy rice. In this case, Zhang Leping seems more interested in the crowd than in the problems of the orphan. The child is the 1361st person in a queue composed of old ladies, crying toddlers, middle-age men and pregnant women. Not all of them are paupers, for instance the man in front of Sanmao has a job, or rather he had one, since

<sup>43</sup> See for instance Wen-Hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 2007), 191-204.

he has just received a letter saying: ' Mr. X, you are fired since you have repeatedly been absent from work without a justifiable reason' (X *Xiansheng, lüci kuangzhizhe ji chuming*, X 先生屢次曠職着即除名). Clearly the man can't go to work since he has to wait his turn to buy rice. In the little frame in the lower corner we see that Sanmao comes back home empty-handed.

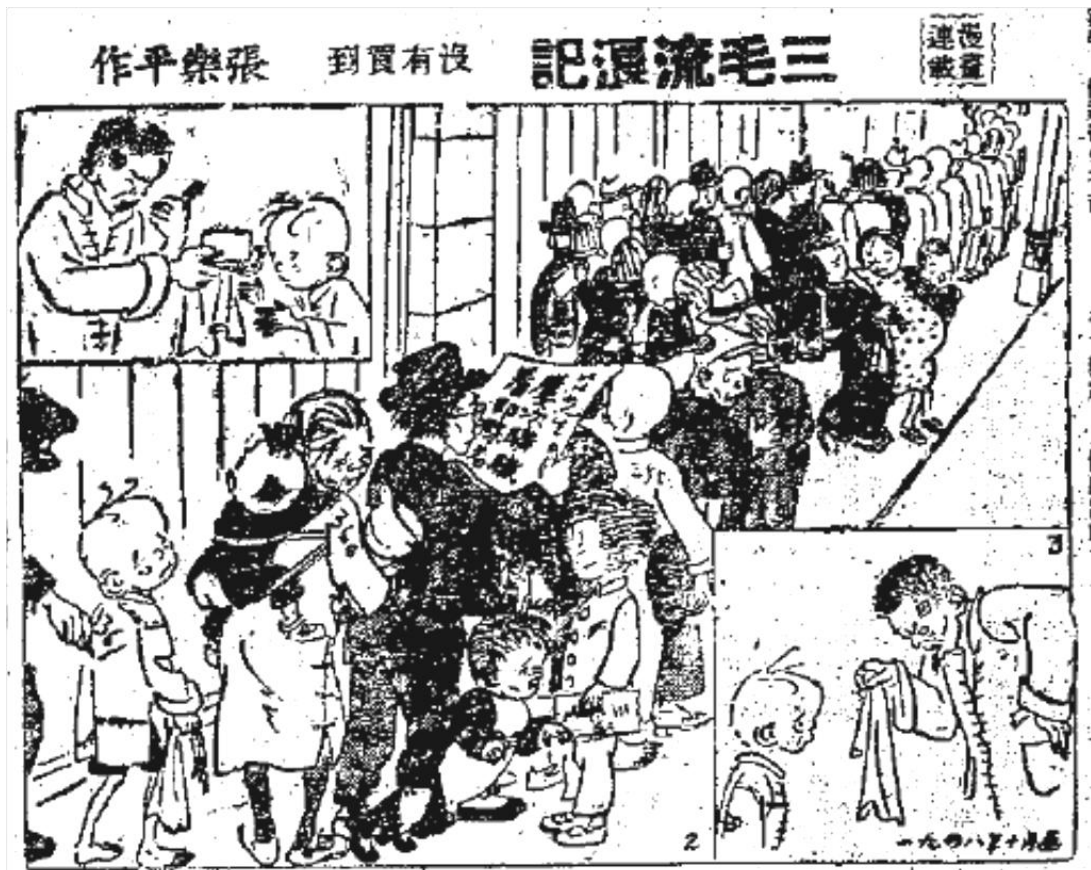


Fig. 4: Zhang Leping. 'Not managing to buy' (*Meiyou maida*, 沒有買到), *Dagongbao* (Tianjin Version), 5 November 1948.

Homeless children like Sanmao were surely the most discriminated against members of Shanghai society. The serial often highlighted the lack of a welfare system able to support the weaker elements in society. Not only did the government seem unable to offer help to refugees, orphans and paupers, but in some cases it allowed private owners to take over the few spaces available to offer some comfort to these people. For instance, in 'No place to come back to' (*Wuchu kegui*, 無處可歸), after spending a few days in jail, Sanmao returns to the hut where he used to live with a poor family. Unfortunately, once back there the child realizes that the shelter has been destroyed in order to make space for new construction. The little hero is again alone on the street (Fig.5).



Once again, this strip portrays real events, in this case showing the destruction of shantytowns and the consequent difficulties of the hut dwellers. Shantytowns had represented a problem for the city for many years, but after the war the situation further deteriorated. There were at least two hundred thousand straw huts in Shanghai, most of which were illegal. The city administration tried to regulate the shanty dwellings, encountering resistance from the hut dwellers.<sup>44</sup> During the years of the Civil War, numerous huts were demolished to restore the land to its owners. Janet Chen quotes the case of Zhonghua Number 1 Textile Mill, which at the end of 1947 asked for the demolition of some huts built too close to their properties.<sup>45</sup> In this strip, Zhang Leping clearly referred to the forced expropriation and demolition of shantytowns, underlining the profound social distress this process caused for the unfortunate people living in these dwellings.



Fig. 5: Zhang Leping. 'No place to come back to' (*Wuchu kegui*, 無處可歸), *Dagongbao*, 2 October 1948.

<sup>44</sup> Christian Henriot, "Straddling Three eras: Shanghai's Hutments between Rejection and Remodeling 1926-1965", Paper presented at the International Workshop «Spaces in- between: from non -place to shared space in developmental cities» Goeth -Institute Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi, 19-23 October 2010.

<http://www.virtualshanghai.net/Texts/Articles?ID=79>. Last access on 3 April 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*, 202-203.

The lack of social welfare was reflected also in the shortage of structures which could accommodate orphan children like Sanmao. After the demolition of his hut, in the strip 'Still Vagrant' (*Ye yao liulang*, 也要流浪), Sanmao looks for shelter at the Bethany Orphanage (*Bodani gu'eryuan*, 伯大尼孤兒院), one of the Christian institutions established in Shanghai in order to help orphans.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, once there the little hero discovers that the court has just granted the tenure of the estate to another owner, causing the closure of the orphanage and leaving several homeless children on the street (Fig. 6). Interestingly, this, the only orphanage appearing in *The Wandering Life*, is not managed by the state, but by a foreign religious organization.<sup>47</sup> As in the case of shantytowns, the state not only fails to provide children with shelter, but it also takes their only home away from them. This situation was quite common, since after the end of the war the legitimate owners of several structures used for charitable purposes came back to the city reclaiming their properties, leaving many refugees on the street.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Some information about Christian institutions active in Shanghai in 1949 can be found in *Shanghai Survey Shanghai gaikuang* 上海概况, April 1949.

<sup>47</sup> As pointed out by Janet Y. Chen, the Nationalist Party established some municipal institutions. One of the first was the Refugee and Refugee Children's Shelter (*Nanmin nantong shourongsuo*), established in 1946 by the Shanghai's Social Affair Bureau. Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*, 193-194.

<sup>48</sup> On people coming back to Shanghai to claim back their properties, see Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*, 156.

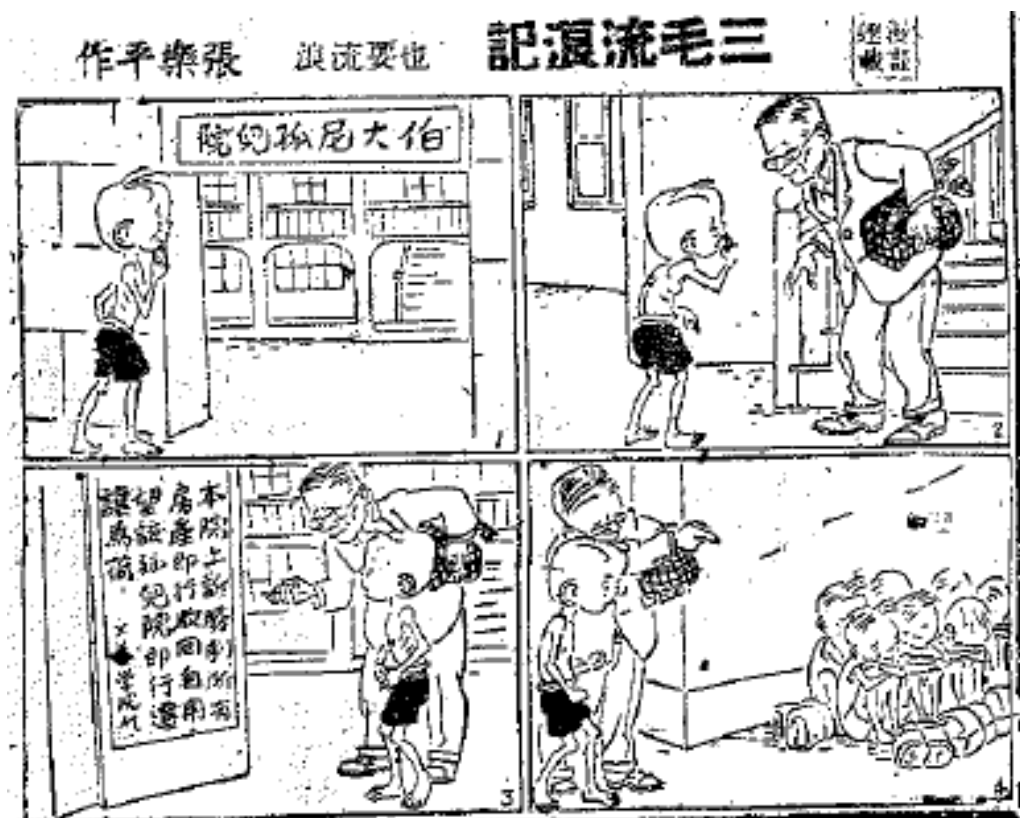


Fig. 6: Zhang Leping. 'Still Vagrant' (*Ye yao liulang*, 也要流浪), *Dagongbao*, 5 October 1948.

*The Wandering Life* showed how years of war and political mismanagement drastically changed the social landscape of the city, compromising not only refugees, orphans and paupers, but also more prosperous residents of the city. In this way, Zhang Leping merged the discourse on orphans' welfare into a more general discussion about contemporary reality. At the same time, the comic introduced clear political criticism of the Nationalist party, which was unable to deal with the social distress.

### Charity, Welfare and Anti-Imperialism

Besides commenting on the degrading conditions in Shanghai society, *The Wandering Life* also portrayed the complex reality of relief work in China. Both the Nationalist Party and the United Nations as well as several private individuals, tried to help the population. What was the impact of relief work in China during the Civil War? How were relief workers represented in Zhang Leping's work and why? At the end of 1944, the UNRRA started in China their largest single-

country program.<sup>49</sup> It was estimated that UNRRA delivered 2.5 million tons of supplies to China between 1945 and 1947. Furthermore, China was the main recipient of UNRRA funds, since it received 518 million dollars to be used for relief purposes.<sup>50</sup> The supplies were not distributed directly by UNRRA, but by the Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (*Xingzhengyuan shanhou jiuji zong shu*, 行政院善後救濟總署) (CNRRA), a body established by Chiang Kai-shek's wife Song Meiling and her brother Song Ziwen 宋子文 (1891-1971) – better known as T.V.Song – and headed by diplomat Jiang Tingfu 蔣廷黻 (1895-1965).<sup>51</sup> The system of distribution was highly criticized by American and Chinese observers, who made allegations of irregularities in the distributions of foodstuff and funds. For instance, the CNRRA asked UNRRA for permission to sell relief goods at a moderate rate in order to raise funds for their distribution.<sup>52</sup> In reality, the Chinese agency was accused of reselling supplies for profit.<sup>53</sup>

Once UNRRA was dissolved in 1947, Chinese and foreign charity foundations took its place in the distribution of humanitarian help. In particular, in the summer 1947 the Shanghai Municipal Government, together with the American Aid to China Commission established the Association for the Promotion of Child Welfare (*Shanghai ertong fuli cujin hui*, 上海兒童福利促進會), headed by Chen Heqin.<sup>54</sup> Although powerful, the association did not receive a sufficient amount of money from the Shanghai Municipal Government, which also barely managed to maintain also other welfare structures such as the Refugee and Refugee Children's Shelter (*Nanmin nantong shourongsuo*).<sup>55</sup> During the Civil War, the Nationalist Party bought financial help also from several philanthropists, creating a state led and privately financed refugee relief program, but the project was not particularly successful.<sup>56</sup> Because of the government's failure to maintain a welfare system, charity became the only alternative for several associations to keep up their

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<sup>49</sup> Rana Mitter, "Imperialism, Transnationalism, and the Reconstruction of Post-war China," 51.

<sup>50</sup> See William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: a New History of the Liberation of Europe* (New York: Free Press, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*, 176. For more information about UNRRA'S activities during the war see also: Eugene Staley, "Relief and Rehabilitation in China," *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol.13, No. 20 (October, 1944): 183–185.

<sup>52</sup> George H. Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956).

<sup>53</sup> Mitter, "Imperialism, Transnationalism, and the Reconstruction of Post-war China", 52.

<sup>54</sup> Dewei Liu, *Yi li zhen zhu de gu shi* <http://www.mjlsh.net/book.aspx?cid=2&tid=2&pid=737>. Last access on 5 May 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*, 164.

<sup>56</sup> Dillon, "Middlemen in the Chinese Welfare State," 33.

mission. But the collection of money and aid was problematic as well. The fancy charity events organized in Shanghai were often considered to mirror of 'the hedonistic and pathological psychology of the city residents.'<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, doubts about how the donations were really employment were rising among the population.

*The Wandering Life* reflected general concern about the reliability of relief and charity foundations. For instance, the two strips 'Exploited' (*Liyong yici*, 利用一次) and 'Making some Superficial Changes' (*Gaitou huanmian*, 改頭換面) showed how sometimes the label of 'charity foundation' could hide illegal activities. In 'Exploited', Sanmao and one of his friends meet a man who generously offers them canned food. The man takes a picture of the two children while they are receiving their presents, before literally kicking them out empty-handed (Fig. 7). In the following strip 'Making some Superficial Changes'; the two children discover their picture printed in the advertisement for a 'Charitable organization for the support of poor people'. Sanmao decides to sabotage the picture drawing the face of the association's chief instead of theirs, and writing the sentence 'They are all his!' (*Dou shi ta*, 都是他) implying that the only person to benefit from charity was the owner of the institute (Fig.8). These strips reflect the climate of suspicion which surrounded welfare and relief work in China, showing how funds and foodstuffs did not always reach the right address. Interestingly, similar strips published in the 1930s had also commented on the fake content of certain advertisements, which promoted miraculous products.

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<sup>57</sup>Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*, 189.



Fig. 7: Zhang Leping. 'Exploited' (*Li yong yici*, 利用一次), *Dagongbao* (Tianjin Edition), 23 July 1948.



Fig. 8: Zhang Leping. 'Making some Superficial Changes' (*Gaitou huanmian*, 改頭換面), *Dagongbao* (Tianjin Edition), 24 July 1948.

If 'Exploited' and 'Making some Superficial Changes' addressed the issue of the reliability of charities, in some other strips Zhang Leping focused on the CNRRA's mismanagement of relief work. This was the case of 'Nobody wants to take care' (*Meiren shouliu*, 没人收留), where Sanmao and his friend try to find a family for an abandoned infant. They first attempt to give the newborn into a woman's custody, but she refuses even to speak with the children; later they try to ask for help from a nursery, but a policeman scares them off. Finally, the two resolve to leave the baby in front of a shop full of powdered milk (Fig. 9). At first sight, this strip reminds us of the two basic themes of *The Wandering Life*: a general lack of care towards orphans and astonishing social inequalities. Nevertheless, there is one detail that gives a second layer to the strip. The packaging of the 'Milk' cans exposed in the shop-window is very similar to that of the American-produced powdered milk 'Klim', a product which formed part of the relief supplies of UNRRA in Shanghai after 1945 (Fig.10). When the *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* was reprinted by the Early Youth Children Press (*Shaonian ertong chubanshe*, 少年儿童出版社) in 2011, in this strip the sign 'Milk' was directly substituted with 'Klim'.<sup>58</sup> The reprinted versions of Zhang Leping's often differ from the original in small, but sometime significant, details. In this case, it seemed that the editor aimed at highlighting the fact that the powdered milk sold in the shop had been originally distributed for relief purposes, but was then sold for profit. Although in the original strip Zhang Leping decided to write only 'Milk' on the cans, the design of the labels is very similar to that of the 'Klim' cans. It is possible that Zhang Leping aimed to criticize the decision of CNRRA to sell relief goods at reasonable prices, accusing the distributors of appropriating food that should have been used for saving lives.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Zhang Leping, *Sanmao Liulangji Quanjì* 三毛流浪記全集 [The Full Collection of The Wandering Life of Sanmao] (Shanghai: Shaonian Ertong Chubanshe, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Mitter, 'Imperialism, Transnationalism, and the Reconstruction of Post-war China', 52.





Fig. 9: Zhang Leping. 'Nobody wants to take care' (*Meiren shouliu*, 没人收留), *Dagongbao* (Tianjin Edition), 6 July 1948.



Fig. 10: Klim powder milk from a commercial of the 1920s. The design of the packaging is very similar to the one of the 'Milk' cans in the strip.

The issue of post-war aid was also central to the anti-American feelings growing among the population. In the years of the Civil War the U.S. backed the GMD in their fight against the Communists. Several cartoonists claimed that the U.S.'s intervention extended the conflict between the two political parties, consequently prolonging the suffering for millions of civilians. Various artists promoted this vision in their cartoons, showing how the American Government kept sending weapons to China instead of much more needed foodstuff.<sup>60</sup> Following the example of his colleagues, Zhang Leping also accused the U.S. of fostering the war. On the occasion of Christmas Day 1948, *Dagongbao* published 'An Intolerable Present' (*Chibuxiao de liwu*, 噢不消的禮物), where a Santa Claus wearing a gas mask offers to Sanmao weapons as presents. The devastated surroundings and the broken skulls on which Santa Claus stands made the scene even more dramatic (Fig. 11). If in the 1930s, the figure of Santa Claus was often associated with the international powers' goal of gaining access to Chinese markets, in Zhang Leping's strip he

<sup>60</sup> See for instance Wang Letian 'Are these Our Food Aids', where a group of men open a box sent from the US and they find weapons instead of food, see Hung, "The Fuming Image," 134.



becomes a symbol of the U.S.'s attempt to disguise their interference in Chinese political affairs as aid for the population.<sup>61</sup>



Fig. 11: Zhang Leping, 'An Intolerable Present' (*Chibuxiao de liwu*, 吃不消的禮物), *Dagongbao* (Shanghai Edition), 25 December 1948.

*The Wandering Life* contained criticism of the mismanagement of relief and charity, often related to internal and international political issues. With this strip, Zhang Leping indirectly criticized the Nationalists for their incompetence in dealing with relief work and for their collaboration with American military forces. Not only did Zhang Leping criticize the failure of relief works through his strips, but thanks to the help of *Dagongbao* and Song Qingling, he also employed his Sanmao in order to raise money for children.

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<sup>61</sup> Gerth, *China Made*, 328.

## The Moral Collapse of Chinese Society, Growing Inequality and the Visual Rhetoric of Children's Day.

In his introduction to the first volume of the comic serial, Wang Yunsheng underlined how Zhang Leping's strips raised readers' awareness of the situation of orphans, inviting them to reflect upon the moral collapse of contemporary society:

[In *The Wandering Life*] from the very beginning, he (Sanmao) wanders around orphaned and alone. On some occasions he receives people's love, but most of the time has to confront people's cruelty. Little Sanmao travels through human reality, a reality in which cruelty is stronger than warmth; nastiness comes before benevolence; hideousness exceeds good, hypocrisy exceeds real feelings and inequality exceeds equality. (...), *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* not only reveals the coldness, cruelty, ugliness and inequality, but what makes it even more valuable is that this comic serial stimulates human kindness and cultivates the innocent compassion of thousands of children. By helping this sense of compassion to develop and mature, it may help to re-establish a sense of justice, re-establish equality among people, and change our society.<sup>62</sup>

As we can see from Wang Yunsheng's words, *The Wandering Life* not only highlighted the worsening social conditions of homeless children and the authorities' inefficiency in dealing with this problem, but it also showed the growing economic inequality among the population and the consequent moral collapse.<sup>63</sup> Most of the characters Sanmao meets on his way try to take advantage of him, or they just ignore his dreadful situation. To unveil exploitation, inequality and cruelty was one of Zhang Leping's major concerns. In particular, the theme of rising inequality was one of the main subjects of contemporary cartoons, which often compared the hardships experience by the poor with the life of the rich and powerful.<sup>64</sup> Zhang Leping revealed the problem of social inequality by focusing mainly on children's experience. The artist's aim was twofold: on the one hand, he accused citizens and authorities of not caring for children highlighting at the same time the demoralization provoked by the economic crisis; on the other

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<sup>62</sup> Wang Yunsheng, "Ti «*Sanmao liulang ji*»" 题《三毛流浪记》 [Introduction for the first volume of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* ], Shanghai, 23 March 1948.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, in his preface for the 'Sanmao Life Exhibition', published on *Dagong bao* on 4 April 1949.

<sup>64</sup> See Hung, "The Fuming Image," 127-128.

hand through the appalling experiences of Sanmao he tried to cultivate compassion in his young readers. Zhang Leping's comments on social inequality and its effects on children were particularly well expressed in the strips the artist produced on the occasion of Children's Day, where also his criticism towards the Nationalist government also reached its peak.

In his introduction to the second collection of *The Wandering Life*, Chen Heqin picked out two strips which successfully addressed the topic of inequality:

Let's look finally at 'Men are inferior to Dogs' (*Ren buru gou*, 人不如狗) and 'Two Worlds' (*Liang ge shiji*, 兩個世界). In the first we can see how while dogs wear coats, men suffer cold and hunger. This sort of phenomenon is quite widespread among urban society, and it should not be considered as an exaggerated representation of reality. In the second strip, Sanmao and another child are separated only by a thin window, but while Sanmao covered in rags is shivering in the snow, on the other side of the window the rich man and his child have warm water, an electric stove and they are even eating ice-cream. This is a true reflection of our society. We arrive at the point where there is no more equality between people; we arrive to the point where people treat each other in a cold manner. Is not this a shameful for humanity?<sup>65</sup>

The two strips selected by Chen Heqin – 'Humans are inferior to dogs' and 'Two Worlds' (Fig.12 and Fig.13) – were particularly representative of Zhang Leping's intention to underline the incongruities of Chinese urban society through a well-constructed visual juxtaposition. Not only are dogs treated better than humans, but while some children freeze on the street, others eat ice-cream in an overheated environment. These strips can hardly be considered humorous, actually they are extremely gloomy.

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<sup>65</sup> Chen Heqin 陈鹤琴, "*Sanmao liulang ji erjixu*" 三毛流浪記二集序 [Preface to the Second Volume of the Wandering Life of Sanmao], *Dagong bao* (Shanghai edition), 15 April 1949.



Fig 12: Zhang Leping. 'Humans are inferior to dogs' (*Ren buru gou*, 人不如狗), *Dagongbao*, 1948.

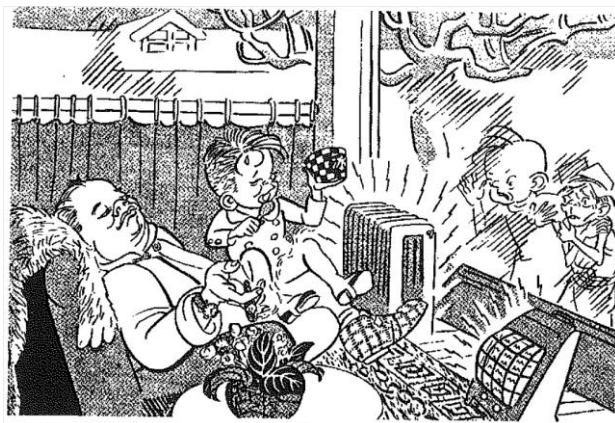


Fig. 13: Zhang Leping. 'Two Worlds' (*Liang ge shiji*, 兩個世界), *Dagongbao*, 1948.

Another strip which deals with the issue of social inequality is 'Ten thousand yuan is the price for a person' (*Wanyuan shenjia*, 萬員身价), where Sanmao observes a poor man carrying two children in rattan baskets, most probably his own offspring, in order to sell them for seventy thousand and fifty thousand yuan respectively.<sup>66</sup> Thinking that he has found a solution to his financial problems, Sanmao decides to become the man's business rival, selling himself at the discounted price of ten thousand yuan. In the next strip, 'Not worth an imported doll' (*Buru yangwa* 不如洋娃), the orphan and the poor man are still waiting for buyers. Eventually, they abandoned their plan. Walking away dissatisfied, Sanmao notices that a shop is selling imported dolls at a discounted price of one hundred thousand yuan, way beyond the price a hypothetical customer would have paid to buy him. Despite the high price, these dolls attract clients (Fig. 14).

<sup>66</sup> Most probably an immigrant from the country side. On immigrants in Shanghai, see Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999)

張樂平作 不如洋娃娃 三毛流浪記 漫遊者



Fig. 14: Zhang Leping. 'Not worth an imported doll' (*Wanyuan shenjia*, 萬員身价), *Dagongbao* 17 May 1948. The banner on the shop window declares that the special price for the doll is of hundred thousand yuan.

This strip is one of the most quoted by historians, since it presents several layers of interpretation. Images of starving children side by side with pictures of expensive dolls were already appeared in Chinese magazines already in the 1930s.<sup>67</sup> As pointed out by Andrew Jones, these images seemed to ask the reader 'How can a foreign doll be more valuable than a Chinese child?' a question which connected children with nationalistic and anti-colonialist rhetoric. 'Not worth an imported doll' employed a similar juxtaposition in order to raise a slightly different set of questions: Why are some children starving on the street when people can afford expensive dolls? Why while Sanmao starves, another child buys an expensive imported doll? In this way, 'Not worth an imported doll' also introduced the idea of inequality among children. Not only are

<sup>67</sup> The cartoon magazine *Modern Sketch* already employed this motif in July 1936. The magazine published two pictures – foreign dolls at the top of the page and poor children on the bottom – in order to show how toys were worth more than children in modern China. See Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*, 126-128.

the life conditions of Sanmao and the rich child are utterly different, but the rich children are taught to buy foreign toys instead of helping a compatriot child.

Besides highlighting the striking social inequality among Chinese citizens, in *The Wandering Life* Zhang Leping showed how Sanmao's misery was actually exacerbated by better-off Shanghai inhabitants, who sometimes worsened his already dreadful life by exploiting him. For instance, when Sanmao is hired as an apprentice in a print shop, the child's experience becomes an occasion for the cartoonist to denounce the oppressive conditions under which young assistants were obliged to work. The practice of hiring apprentices was a very well established practice in China. Young workers – often adolescents or children – were hired by shopkeepers, artisans and factories in order to learn a profession.<sup>68</sup> The Confucian practice of respecting the master and the idea the young workers had to 'learn diligence and experience hardship' made it even easier for entrepreneurs to exploit their apprentices, pushing them to work for long hours, underpaying them squalid accommodations.<sup>69</sup> The May Fourth Movement criticized this practice, throwing light on the deprivation and misery in which apprentices were obliged to live.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the renowned linguist and poet Liu Bannong 劉半農 (1891-1934) described apprentices' hardship in a poem published in the magazine *Shenghuo* 生活 in 1926:

The master lectured the apprentice on 'diligence';  
At dawn he is to unlock the shop and sweep the floor.  
At nightfall he is to sleep on the floor and watch the door. (...)  
The mistress has a small child. She orders:  
'You! Lad! Hold the baby!' (...)  
Endlessly from morning to afternoon,  
The apprentice runs east to fetch liquor and juice,  
West to buy vegetables and bean curd;  
He waits at the table three meals a day. (...)

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<sup>68</sup> Joshua H. Howard, *Workers at War: Labor in China's Arsenal, 1937-1953* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Stephen A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: a Comparative History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 136-137. See also Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, 105.

<sup>70</sup> Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China*, 137.

His meals are leftovers that do not satisfy his hunger.

In the summer he is given no shirts to wear. In the winter he shivers in rage. (...) <sup>71</sup>

All the elements of this poem – which were part of a well-established repertoire about workers' hardship under petty-bourgeois masters – were represented in the 33 strips of *The Wandering Life* dedicated to Sanmao's apprenticeship.<sup>72</sup> Besides working in the shop, the little hero takes care of the numerous young sons of the owner. Furthermore, the family proves to be particularly stingy when it comes to providing Sanmao with food clothes. For instance, in 'Quarrelling over Leftovers' (*Wandi fantian*, 碗底翻天) Sanmao waits at table for the owner's family, who enjoy a rich meal. Nevertheless, at the end of the dinner the orphan is left only with a bowl of rice (Fig. 15). In 'Putting on Airs' (*Bai choujiazi*, 摆臭架子), the artist reflects upon the abuse of power of employers over their apprentices. The orphan is supposed to serve tea to his boss, but he cannot reach the glass placed on a high desk. Irritated, the boss forces Sanmao to climb on his stool, to pour the tea and to leave the room after cleaning the seat. In the last panel, the child realizes that the complicated procedure could have been avoided if the man had moved his cup closer to him (Fig. 16).

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<sup>71</sup> Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, 106.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

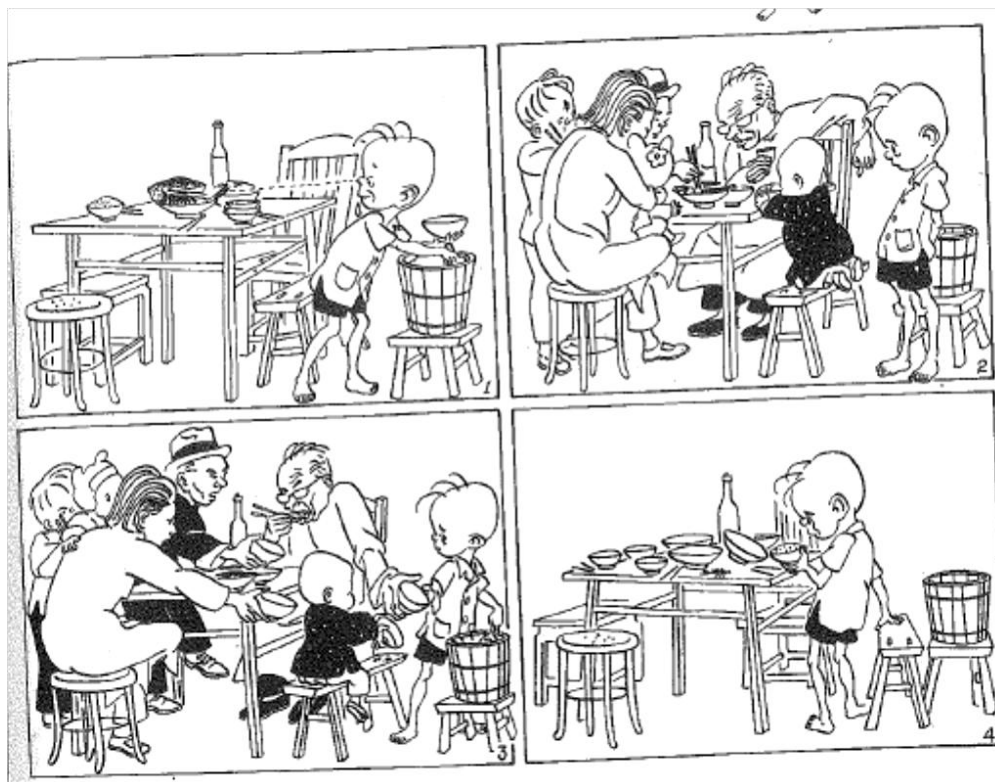


Fig. 15: Zhang Leping. 'Quarrelling over Leftovers' (*Wandi fantian*, 碗底翻天), *Dagongbao*, 1948.

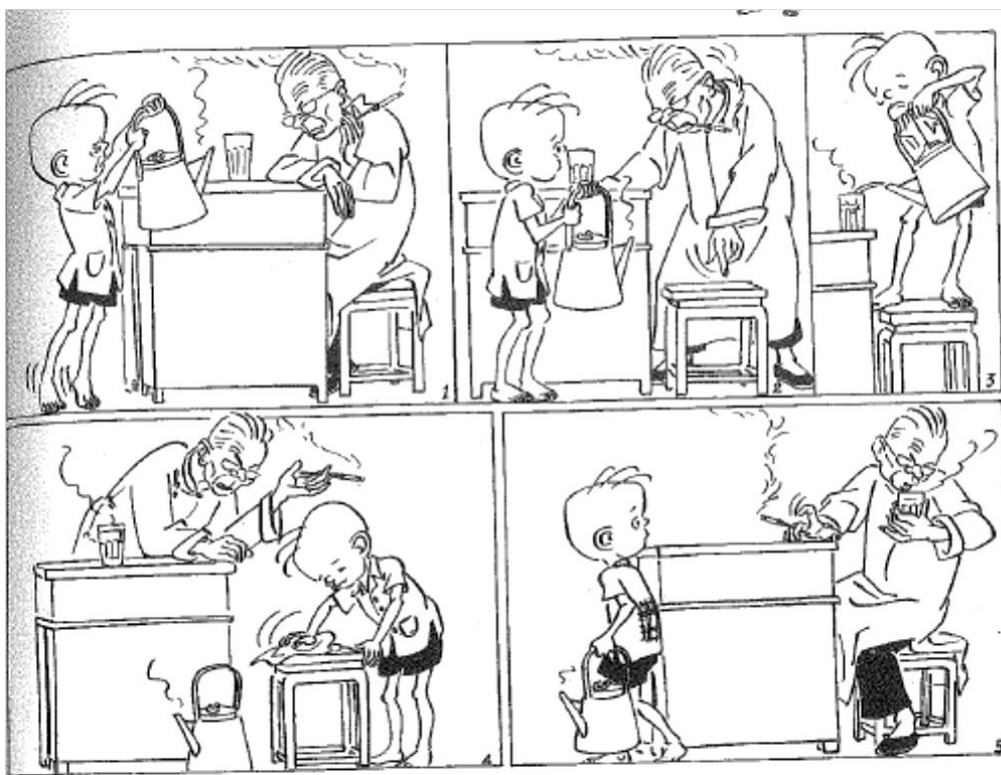


Fig. 16: Zhang Leping. 'Putting on Airs' (*Bai choujiazi*, 摆臭架子), *Dagongbao*, 1948.



Zhang Leping's decision to expose the hardships of apprenticeship was connected with the reformist discussion started by the May Fourth Movement. Moreover, the artist claimed that he had experienced a similar treatment when at the age of fifteen he became an apprentice in a printer's workshop in Shanghai.<sup>73</sup> These strips attracted the attention of educators and intellectuals, among them Chen Heqin, who in his preface to the second volume of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*, decided to comment precisely on Sanmao's experience as apprentice:

Wang Yongheng said in the previous introduction: "Our society is cruel (*canren*, 殘忍) towards all these children; how can it be not cruel toward all the poor Chinese?" I think that, from what we see and hear from the experience of Sanmao, to use the adjective "cruel" is not exactly honest. When we look at the strips 'Leftovers' and 'Putting on Airs', is not the behaviour of the boss toward his apprentice far more than just 'cruel'? The boss and his family members do not even regard their apprentice as human, they eat meat and fish, and they leave just a few 'leftovers' for the poor child. In 'Putting on Airs', the boss doesn't even want to move his hand, and he makes his poor, thin apprentice climb on the stool just to serve him some tea. This sort of child abuse is a disgrace for mankind.<sup>74</sup>

Chen Heqin, was particularly sensitive to the issue of young apprentices, since one of the accusations against this tradition was that it kept children out of school.<sup>75</sup> In this case, however, the educationalist seemed more concerned with the cruel treatment received by Sanmao than with his education. Although Chen Heqing focuses his accusation on petty entrepreneurs and on the apprenticeship tradition, his critique extends to all Chinese society. Strips such as 'Leftovers' and 'To Bully' connected the discourse on apprenticeship with the more general problem of exploitation and inequality in Chinese society.

In commenting on *The Wandering Life*, Farquhar has pointed out that in this serial Zhang Leping, voluntarily introduced 'a clear differentiation of class' in his comics.<sup>76</sup> Certainly, the strips we have analyzed above show both the astonishing economic inequality among the population and

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<sup>73</sup> Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin, *Zhongguo Manhua Lishi*, 260.

<sup>74</sup> Chen Heqin, "Sanmao liulang ji erjixu", *Dagong bao* (Shanghai edition), 15 April 1949.

<sup>75</sup> Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, 107.

<sup>76</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 206.

the tendency to exploit the weaker elements of society for economic profit. Nevertheless, while these strips about rich people and about the print-shop owner seem to foster class struggle, in this serial Zhang Leping often shows how Sanmao receives care from wealthy people, while he is exploited by the poor. For this reason, after 1949, one of the main criticisms that the Communist authorities made of *The Wandering Life* was Zhang Leping's imprecise representation of class.<sup>77</sup> In *The Wandering Life*, Zhang Leping introduced leftist themes such as inequality and exploitation, but as in *Sanmao Joins the Army*, his main aim was to show his readers how the contemporary socio-political situation harmed Chinese society, and children in particular. The characters of Zhang Leping were often the less respectable elements of society, and not class-conscious factory workers. Through the serial, Zhang Leping showed how economic and social inequality was transmitted from generation to generation, with homeless children like Sanmao occupying the lowest position on the social ladder. In order to better illustrate this concept, he often represented how children of different social backgrounds celebrated National Children's Day. Since this was an official festivity instituted by the Nationalist government, in the strips Children's Day becomes an occasion for criticizing the Nationalist authorities.

From the first year of celebration in 1932, the Nationalist Party always influenced the public festivities for Children's Day. For instance, in the early 1930s the mayor of Shanghai used to give public speeches to children and their families emphasizing the important role of the young generation for the future of the country.<sup>78</sup> The celebration would continue with Boy Scouts' parades, dedicated parties and amusing festivities all around the city. From its institution, Children's Day had always been an occasion for the Nationalist government to restate its role as protector of China's youngest citizens. In *The Wandering Life*, Zhang Leping subverted this rhetoric by describing the festivities of Children's Day from the perspective of the orphan Sanmao. Children's Day became an occasion for analyzing the widening gap between children of different social class in China, underlining the uncaring attitude of the Nationalist government towards this problem.

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<sup>77</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>78</sup> Gerth, *China Made*, 323-324.

The first strip of *The Wandering Life* dedicated to Children's Day, entitled 'They are all children' (同是兒童, *Tongshi ertong*) appeared in *Dagongbao* on 18 April 1948. In the first panel, a group of children watch the performance of an acrobat – one of the cruel employers of the little hero – and his young assistant Sanmao. A poster glued to a pole announces the celebration of Children's Day. Although the little hero is clearly in pain because of his unnatural position, the public do not show any sign of compassion or sorrow for the child. The only person to show understanding of Sanmao's suffering is another poor kid standing in the corner unable to watch the ignoble show (Fig. 17). This image strongly criticizes the increasing difference between social classes in China. Sanmao is a child, and as such deserves to celebrate the festivities dedicated to him. Yet, on the contrary, for him Children's Day means another day of exploitation and pain. By emphasizing that Sanmao has no possibility of enjoying the day, Zhang Leping implies that the street urchin is not as significant for the government as other richer children. Furthermore, by allowing their offspring to enjoy the show, these parents are supporting instead of condemning inequality among children.

張樂平作 兒童是同 三毛流浪記 連環圖



Fig. 17: Zhang Leping. 'All of them are children' (同是兒童, *Tongshi ertong*), *Dagongbao*, 18 April 1948.

A similar message appeared also in 'Ideal and Reality' (*Lixiang yu xianshi* 理想與現實) published one year later on the occasion of the yearly Children's Day. In contrast to 'All of them are children', the new strip contained clear criticism of the Nationalists' politics. In the first panel, Sanmao finds a flyer saying 'Children are the Masters of the Future' (*Ertong shi weilai zhurenweng*, 兒童是未来主人翁). Happy to be finally the center of attention, the little hero looks for a way to celebrate the day. Soon he discovers that for him it not so easy to participate in the festivities of Children's Day: he cannot take advantage of discounted clothes, a guard forbids him from entering a public meeting, and finally he does not receive expensive presents like many other children. In the last panel, Sanmao throws his flyer on the street, while the megaphones assail him with a multitude of slogans such as 'We must cherish children' (*Women yao aihu ertong*, 我們要愛護兒童), 'We must educate children' (*Peizhi ertong*, 培植兒童) and

'We must Respect Children' (*Zunjing ertong*, 尊敬兒童) (Fig. 18). In this case Zhang Leping suggests that none of the idealistic rhetoric connected with the Children's Day corresponded to reality, accusing the Nationalist government of lying to its citizens and of treating homeless children as second class citizens.



Fig. 18: Zhang Leping. 'Ideal and Reality' (*Lixiang yu xianshi* 理想與現實), *Dagongbao*, 4 April 1949.

The highly symbolical 'Double Tenth Street Corner' (*Shuangshi jietou*, 雙十街頭), can be considered as the most representative image of Zhang Leping's concept of children's inequality. In this strip, children are celebrating the Double Ten Day (*Shuangshi jie*, 雙十節), the anniversary of the Wuchang Uprising (*Wuchang qiye*, 武昌起义) of 1911, which owed its name to the date on which it occurred, namely, 10 October.<sup>79</sup> Also the symbol of the day – the Double Ten, product of the joining of two Chinese characters for 'ten' 十十 (*shishi*) – originated from the date of the uprising.<sup>80</sup> In this strip composed of a single panel, Sanmao stands in the middle of a crossroads with a rich kid, while in the background it is possible to see other children (probably

<sup>79</sup> Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen*, 93-94.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, See also Chapter 1.

Boy Scouts) marching. The rich child is eating candies without any consideration for the poor starving orphan. The differences between the two are striking: the rich child is dressed in western-style clothes, he is well nourished and he has a happy expression on his face. The rich child happily holds in his hand a little flag with the double ten symbol, reinforcing the idea that he is the kind of child the government supports as a model citizen. On the contrary, Sanmao is half-naked, barefoot and malnourished. Significantly, the shadows of the two children form two crosses, which remind us of the iconic symbol of the Double Ten, but also of the Christian cross, symbol of death which Zhang Leping already employed in his strips in the 1930s.<sup>81</sup> The two children stand under two national flags, which underline the role that Nationalist politics played in widening social and political inequality among the new generation. By playing on the double meaning of the cross and connecting it with the Nationalist government, Zhang Leping warned the population and authorities about the possibly destructive consequences of growing inequality in the Chinese nation (Fig. 19).

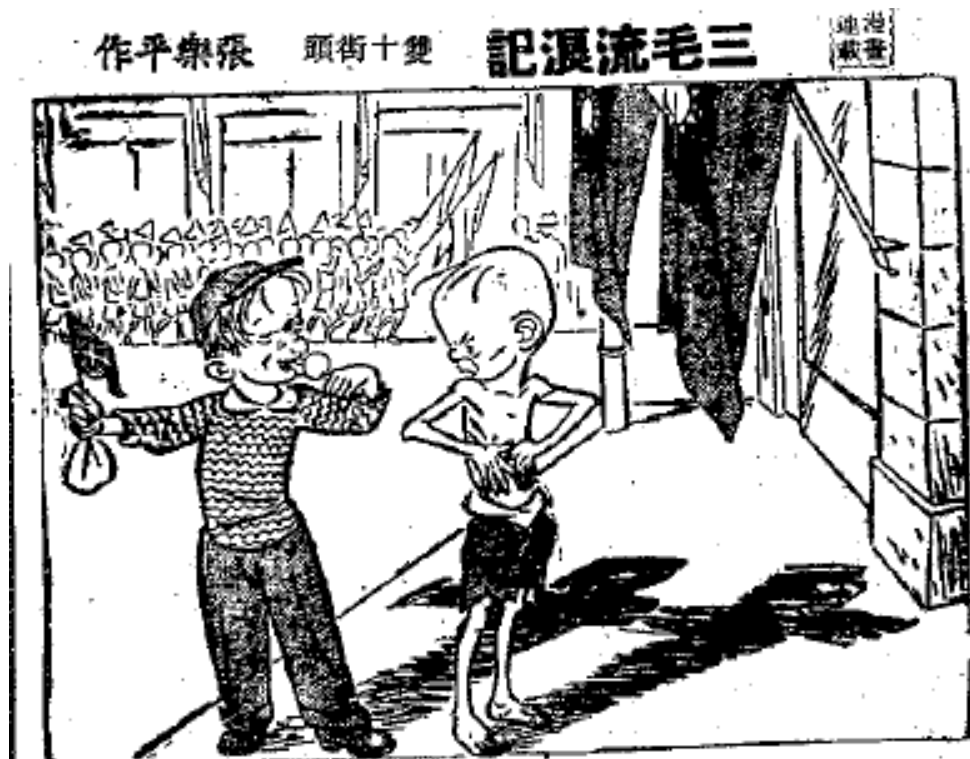


Fig. 19: Zhang Leping. 'Double Ten Street Corner' (*Shuangshi jietou*, 雙十街頭), *Dagongbao*, 17 October 1948.

<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 1.

*The Wandering Life of Sanmao* developed themes that Zhang Leping had already tackled in his previous works, such as the problem of homeless children, exploitation, growing socio-economic inequality and collapsing social mores. As main protagonists of the strips and main readers, children were once again at the center of Zhang Leping's work. The socio-political criticism of *The Wandering Life* was mostly connected with contemporary problems of children's welfare, aid, and education. In particular, the celebrations of National Children's Day became an occasion for the artist to underline the growing inequality among Chinese citizens. Children's Day also became the moment in which Zhang Leping published strips which presented direct criticism of the Nationalist government, accused of overlooking the terrible conditions in which many of the 'future masters of the nation' lived. Zhang Leping's condemnation of the Nationalist government became increasingly more evident in the course of *The Wandering Life*.

### **PHILANTHROPY, EDUCATION AND POLITICS IN *THE WANDERING LIFE*: THE CASE OF THE 'SANMAO LIFE EXHIBITION'**

In the introduction to the first issue of *Children and Society* (*Ertong yu shehui*, 兒童與社會), editor Yan Xinzhe 言心喆 reminded his readers of the importance of children for the future of China:

Before the establishment of the Republic, we decided that children's welfare was the most important foundation for the development of our country, because the children of today are the citizens of tomorrow. As you can see, 20 years after the establishment of the Republic, children are considered as the backbone of the country, which will preserve the destiny of our nation. Furthermore they are exalted as the fresh forces who will support our people's vigor. They not only will carry out the construction of our future country, but also ensure the peace of the world! However, I don't know how many boys' and girls' future have been ruined by the fake love of a step-mother, I don't know how many boys' and girls' futures have been ruined by their stern fathers. This not only is a misfortune for society and the nation, but it is an incalculable loss for every single person. Then there are many children like 'Sanmao', who are vagrants on the streets during the winter days, who do not have a

family, who do not have enough food and clothes, who were there during the chaos of the War, stayed under fire for days, and with the high price of goods can be seen everywhere.<sup>82</sup>

*Children and Society* was published in Shanghai by the editorial department of the Shanghai Children's Welfare Promotion Association (*Shanghai ertong fuli cujinhui*, 上海兒童福利促進會), an organization founded in 1947 by educator Chen Heqin in order to help poor children in Shanghai. This editorial underlined how for decades children were considered 'the backbone' of the country, but pointed out how years of war had worsened the living conditions of China's youngest citizens. In this context, the editor presents Sanmao as the symbol of thousands of homeless children wandering around the country. *Children and Society* was not the only magazine to employ the iconic image of Sanmao when engaging with issues related to child welfare. In the same year, in his introduction to the first comic book of *The Wandering Life*, Wang Yunsheng stated: 'He (Sanmao) is the symbol of the fate of many Chinese children. Furthermore, he is the symbol of the destiny of many poor and kind-hearted Chinese.'<sup>83</sup> Between 1948 and 1949 several Chinese journalists referred to homeless children as 'Sanmao'.<sup>84</sup>

In this section I will show how the cartoonist's strips became a powerful channel for the popularization of ideas circulating among a larger group of intellectuals, social workers, and educators. The editor of *Dagongbao*, educator Chen Heqin, social worker Liu Dewei 劉德偉 and even Song Qingling employed Zhang Leping's works in order to implement their political agenda. Through the pages of newspapers – especially *Dagongbao* – these personalities quoted, supported and discussed the content of *The Wandering Life*, at the same time proclaiming Zhang Leping protector of Chinese children. In particular, I will analyze how Zhang Leping's *Sanmao* strips, while on the one hand employed for philanthropic purposes, were, on the other hand various personalities, used by various personalities in order to underline the GMD's failure in providing for children. I will argue that *The Wandering Life* served multiple interconnected aims, which were philanthropic, educational and political. At the same time, the iconic image of Sanmao was employed outside the comic strips for similar purposes. In particular, the 'Sanmao

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<sup>82</sup> See for instance "Fakanci," 發刊詞 [The Inaugural Introduction], *Children and Society* (*Ertong Yu shehui*, 兒童與社會), Issue 1, 1948.

<sup>83</sup> Wang Yunsheng, "Ti «Sanmao liulang ji», " Shanghai, 23 March 1948.

<sup>84</sup> *Children and Society*, Issue 1, 1948.



Life Exhibition' organized by Song Qingling for the 1949 Children's Day, was an occasion in which Zhang Leping's little hero was employed outside the comic strips in an event which partly aimed at collecting funds for homeless children, but also at highlighting the weaknesses of the Nationalist Party.

As we have seen in the previous pages, in *The Wandering Life* Zhang Leping shared themes and concepts with contemporary left-wing cultural products. Furthermore he criticized the Nationalist government for being unable to alleviate the problem of growing inequality among the population, and children in particular. However, through his comic strips Zhang Leping aimed also to evoke a sympathetic response from readers towards real street urchins, and perhaps to encourage donations from those willing to help. The idea of showing people's suffering in order to inform the public and to encourage possible donors to make a contribution towards solving pressing social problems was not new in China. For instance, in her book about the survivors of the Taiping rebellion (1850-1864), Tobie Meyer-Fong quotes the example of the failed examination candidate and popular philanthropist Yu Zhi (1809-1874), who after the end of the war decided to raise money to provide assistance to the refugees of the Jiangnan area.<sup>85</sup> Yu Zhi published several pamphlets describing the suffering of the population during the Taiping rebellion, often using dramatic images. The pamphlet *Tears from Jiangnan* described through 42 illustrations the history of the Taiping occupation of Jiangnan and the impact on the lives of its residents. According to Meyer-Fong, Yu Zhi produced these illustrations since he believed that by 'depicting visually what people cannot bear to see – to force them to witness – the book is meant to move people to moral and philanthropic actions'.<sup>86</sup> In *Tears from Jiangnan*, Yu Zhi did not represent concrete events, but situations of suffering to which everybody could relate, making people more willing to donate. A fervent pro-Qing intellectual, with this pamphlet Yu Zhi also attempted to denounce the moral collapse brought about by war and the necessity to support the Qing dynasty in order to bring back peace and restore moral values among the population.<sup>87</sup> In portraying scenes of suffering, violence and loss of morality in pamphlets like *Tears from Jiangnan*, Yu Zhi pursued philanthropic, pedagogical, and political aims.

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<sup>85</sup> Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to terms with Civil War in 19th Century China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

The example of Yu Zhi's pamphlet can help us to see *The Wandering Life* from a different perspective. To analyze Zhang Leping's work solely on the basis of its political content would be reductive; as we have seen in the case of Yu Zhi, there are several interrelated purposes involved in the publication of images showing people's suffering. Despite the fact that the work of Yu Zhi and Zhang Leping differed greatly (for instance, Yu Zhi's illustrations were not even slightly humoristic), *Tears from Jiangnan* and *The Wandering Life* shared similar ideas. Like Yu Zhi, Zhang Leping aimed to focus public attention on the people's suffering and on the moral corruption of contemporary society by crystallizing it in a memorable visual image. The images of *The Wandering Life* were more powerful than words, and they brought to public attention political and moral dilemmas which written words could not explain as clearly. By showing the moral collapse of the population, Zhang Leping also pursued his political criticism towards the Nationalist government, guilty of not helping citizens in need and of being unable to punish corrupt officials, greedy businessmen and criminals. Finally, as we shall see, the artist also managed to employ his cartoon hero in order to collect funding for real homeless children. To make child and adult readers aware of the sad life of street urchins in order to urge them to donate money to rescue them was perhaps the biggest success of *The Wandering Life*. How did Zhang Leping succeed in this mission? On one side, readers were so fond of Sanmao that they were willing to help real children living in similar conditions; on the other side, politicians, social workers, educators and intellectuals employed the iconic image of Zhang Leping's hero to collect funding, organizing events or writing articles about homeless children, often combining philanthropic purposes with a specific political agenda.

Readers' admiration and love for cute Sanmao were one of the most important reasons for the success of *The Wandering Life* from the philanthropic, pedagogical and political perspective. As playwright Xia Yan pointed out in 1949, 'Sanmao is the character that everybody knows in Shanghai'.<sup>88</sup> The little hero achieved resounding success with the public from his first appearance, but the immense popularity of *The Wandering Life* started a process in which some began to believe in the real existence of the fictional hero. Tens of letters sent to *Dagongbao* showed how

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<sup>88</sup> Xia Yan, "Sanmao liulang ji quanji daiyu" 三毛流浪記全集代序 [Preface to the Complete Collection of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*], 1950.

readers addressed Sanmao as a flesh and blood person. The original letters and several of the presents sent are conserved at the Zhang Leping Memorial Museum.<sup>89</sup> These letters, sent mostly by children, but also by adults, are a precious source of information for understanding the importance of Sanmao's image for the popularization of Zhang Leping's moral, philanthropic and political ideals. Most of these messages reveal that children were very fond of the little hero, to the point of thinking him a real person. For instance, in her letter sent to *Dagongbao* on 6 June 1947, eight-year-old Cheng Hamei 吴阿妹 offered to put Sanmao up in her home.<sup>90</sup>

Dear Mr. Leping

Sanmao is still wandering. Why don't you treat him a bit better? Afterwards, if you still treat him badly, I want to invite him to come to live in my house.

Cheng Hamei -

Similarly, also eight-year-old Yao Shuping 姚蜀平 anxiously asked about the little hero's whereabouts:

Dear Mr. Leping

It's three days since I've seen Sanmao, I'm very concerned about him, where did he go? Did he die of hunger? Did he freeze to death? Did he go to school? Please let me know!

Yao Shuping,

These two letters share a number of features. Both Cheng Hamei and Yao Shuping ask Zhang Leping about the situation of Sanmao, acknowledging in this way that the artist is the creator of the little hero, the one who the child's fate. Nevertheless, at the same time these two children are very concerned about Sanmao, as if he was a real person, to the point of offering him concrete help, such as shelter. Although these two young readers acknowledge Zhang Leping's role in the creation of the strips, it seems that thanks to *The Wandering Life* the fictional character of Sanmao has gone through a process of humanization. The love of child readers for Sanmao was central to Zhang Leping's pedagogical mission, since they often translated their concern for

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<sup>89</sup> A picture of the letters can be seen in Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 19.

<sup>90</sup> Huang Ke, Guan Zhenhu and Chen Lei, *Lao Shanghai Manhua*, 316.

Sanmao into interest in and concrete help for real street urchins. By encouraging his readers to witness the little hero's harsh life, Zhang Leping invited them to pay attention to those real children living on the street like Sanmao. Readers' concern for the misfortunes of the fictional character pushed them to help real children. In addition, comic strip heroes are often successfully expanded through commercial culture, since readers are willing to buy products reproducing the image of their favorite characters in order to extend the time they spend with them and deepen their relations with them.<sup>91</sup> In the case of *The Wandering Life*, to strengthen contact with Sanmao, children decided to donate money and objects to help him. On several occasions, readers mailed to *Dagongbao* objects and money for the orphan. The generosity of readers moved Zhang Leping to the point that he mentioned how a child had sent him a woollen sweatshirt for the little hero in his presentation for the 'Sanmao Exhibition' in April 1949:

I often receive letters like this from my young readers: 'I'm glad to send you this woollen garment, please give it to Mr. Zhang Leping, and please tell him to put this garment on Sanmao. Recently the weather has been cold, but Sanmao has been wearing only a Hong Kong-style shirt. Although this garment is small, if Sanmao can use it in order to fight cold, obtain some warmth, thousands of readers will also be relieved.' This is only one of the hundreds of letters that moved my heart. I'm often moved by the pure love expressed in these letters, and thanks to them I know that my hard work has not been in vain.<sup>92</sup>

The determination of readers to help Sanmao confirmed Zhang Leping's talent as a writer of children's literature and his success in instilling a sense of 'human compassion' into child readers.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Zhang Leping also managed to use the figure of Sanmao for philanthropic purposes. The letter of a mother published in *Dagongbao* in November 1947 can help us to understand how this worked:

Unexpectedly, the recently published strips 'People are not grass and Trees' (*Ren fei caomu*, 人非草木) and 'There are still good people' (*Hai you haoren*, 還有好人), has given rise to a

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<sup>91</sup> Ian Gordon, "Mass Market Modernism: Comic Strips and the Culture of Consumption," 46-66.

<sup>92</sup> Zhang Leping, "Wo zenme yang hua Sanmao de- wei Sanmao yizhang xie" 我怎樣畫三毛的-為三毛義展寫 [How do I draw Sanmao- Written for the Sanmao Exhibition] *Dagong bao* (Shanghai Edition), 4 April 1949.

<sup>93</sup> Wang Yunsheng, "Ti «Sanmao liulang ji" , 23 March 1948.

great tumult among my children. This was the situation in my family: my first and second sons did not know whether to cry or to laugh, they were dumbfounded all day long, at the point that they didn't even eat their porridge. My third and fourth children blushed, and they would have liked to give their knitted woolen vests to Sanmao. My fifth took back to the shop owner some empty bottles of soya sauce in order to obtain money and donate it (...) <sup>94</sup>

After describing the reactions of her five children to the most recent adventures of Sanmao, the woman explains how her family planned to save money, around 500.000 yuan, in order to donate them to poor children.<sup>95</sup> This letter testifies to children's emotional response to Sanmao's adventures, but also to the roles of their parents in transforming their offspring's ideas into concrete help. In response to the donations spontaneously sent by readers, the editorial department of *Dagongbao* decided to open the 'Sanmao's Happiness Fund' (*Sanmao xingfu jijin*, 三毛幸福基金), through which the contributions were then distributed among different associations helping homeless children in China.

With *The Wandering Life*, Zhang Leping succeeded in mobilizing his readers to support the cause of street urchins. As appears from other letters, Sanmao's story opened readers' eyes to people's cruelty. For instance, in his letter eleven-year-old Wang Churong 王楚容 states clearly that Sanmao's problems were caused by the collapsing moral values of contemporary society:

Do I think that Mr. Zhang's description is true? For sure it makes our innocent children's hearts wish Sanmao could leave his terrible life and walk towards a splendid future! These strips remind us that nowadays popular feelings are very cruel, and that Sanmao's terrible life is caused by human inequality.

Cleverly, Wang Churong pointed out that despite Sanmao remaining the center of attention for child readers, some of them also understood the social criticism presented in the strips. Similarly, Ma Yilun 馬翼倫 and Zou Buqing 左步青, two students of Jinan University praised *The*

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<sup>94</sup> From *Dagongbao* (Shanghai Edition), 29 November 1947. Huang Ke, *Lao Shanghai manhua*, 317.

<sup>95</sup> 500 thousands yuan was the value of a banknote called *Jinyuanjuan* 金圓捲 printed by the Guomindang Government Central Bank between 1947 and 1949.

*Wandering Life* for teaching benevolence to children and for criticizing widespread cruelty and inequality:

'Mr. Leping,

People who have money dress in winter clothes, but the poor orphan Sanmao just wears unlined garments and short pants, he trembles in the cold north wind. This is too sad. Despite some rich and heartless people, still most human beings are full of compassion, especially all those innocent pure-hearted good children. They sent you an appeal in order to help Sanmao, didn't they? Now, we two older children, once more sincerely ask for your help, please give winter clothes to Sanmao. Even a cotton-padded jacket is fine, let him enjoy a bit of warmth. We wish happiness to you and Sanmao, this poor child.'<sup>96</sup>

In this letter, the two university students prove that through *The Wandering Life* Zhang Leping managed to fulfil moral, philanthropic and political aims. Ma Yilun and Zou Buqing highlighted how children sending help for Sanmao are 'innocent and pure-hearted', in contrast with 'rich and heartless people', constantly attacked in the strips as selfish and incapable of performing any act of human compassion. What both these letters suggest is that readers were mostly concerned with the decay of the Confucian notion of benevolence (*ren*) and the consequent rise of cruelty among Chinese people. In this respect, *The Wandering Life* was successful in at least two ways: firstly, child readers' love for Sanmao was translated into compassion and concrete help for real homeless children; secondly, simultaneously, by comparing the little hero's poor life with the life-style of the rich, Zhang Leping successfully transformed Sanmao into a symbol of the effects of social inequality, denouncing those who overlooked the problem of the poor and clearly showing to child readers the source of their favorite hero's suffering.

Zhang Leping's personal reputation for being an honest man dedicated to the welfare of poor children convinced readers that he was a trustworthy recipient for donations. His past as a war hero, his interest in the urban poor and his own background as a member of the lower class were often used in order to prove his sincerity and integrity in helping the urban poor, and orphans in

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<sup>96</sup> Letter published in Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin, *Zhongguo manhua shi*, 265.

particular.<sup>97</sup> While readers might have had doubts about the honesty of government organizations and charity foundations – doubts that as we have seen were also represented in Zhang's strips – they seemed to trust the cartoonist and the editorial board of *Dagongbao*. Zhang Leping's strips reached the peak of popularity in 1949 thanks to Song Qingling's interest in his work. In January, Song Qingling contacted Zhang Leping with the idea of using Sanmao's image in order to advertise the work of the China Welfare Fund (*Zhongguo fuli jijin hui*, 中國福利基金會), the spin-off association of the wartime China Defense League (*Zhongguo baowei tongmeng*, 中國保衛同盟).<sup>98</sup> It was decided to organize a charity event based on the iconic figure of Zhang's cartoon hero. The result was the 'Exhibition of Sanmao Original Works' of which I spoke at the beginning of this chapter, and the 'Sanmao Life Exhibition' (*Sanmao shenghuo zhanlanhui*, 三毛生活展覽會), which opened on the occasion of National Children's Day on the fourth floor of the popular Sun Company Department Store (*Daxin gongsi*, 大新公司), in the commercial area of Nanjing Road .<sup>99</sup> In the months before the exhibition Zhang Leping had been fighting a lung disease, which prevented him from publishing new strips in *Dagongbao*. According to his son Zhang Weijun, Song Qingling in person helped the artist to solve this problem bringing medicine from Europe.<sup>100</sup> In March 1949, Zhang Leping resumed his work for *Dagongbao*. Furthermore he produced 30 color paintings of Sanmao, which were sold for charity during the 'Sanmao Life Exhibition'(Fig. 20).<sup>101</sup> At the same time, Song Qingling also launched 'Sanmao Playground' (*Sanmao leyuan*, 三毛樂園), a permanent charity fund for orphans which awarded the honorary title of 'Sanmao's friends' to all those children willing to donate money.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Simao 四毛, "Sanmao liulang ji zuozhe Zhnag Leping shi zenmeyang de yi ge ren" *The Newest News Fortnightly*, 1947.

<sup>98</sup> The China Defense League was established in 1938 in Hong Kong by Song Ziwen , while his sister Song Qingling served as chairman. The main aim of the association was to collect funding in order to help the population during the strenuous years of war. For more information about their activities see: *The annual Report of China Defense League 1939-1940*, available on Lewis & Clark Digital Collection <http://digitalcollections.lclark.edu/items/show/6013>. Last access 3 April 2014.

<sup>99</sup> This department store was later renamed Shanghai No.1 Department Store (Shanghai Diyi Baihuoshangdian, 上海市第一百货商店) in October 1949. For more information about Department Store and Nanjing Road commercial area see: Sherman Cochran, *Inventing Nanjing Road : commercial culture in Shanghai, 1900-1945*, (Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 1999).

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Zhang Weijun, December 2013.

<sup>101</sup> Some of these paintings are now preserved at the Zhang Leping Mausoleum in Haiyan, at least two are property of the family of the artist.

<sup>102</sup> Xu, "Save the children," 153.

Several newspapers advertised these events, especially *Dagongbao*, which on 21 March dedicated to the event an article entitled 'Who wants to see Sanmao? Please go to The Sun Store!' (*Shei yao kan Sanmao? Qing dao Daxin qu!* 誰要看三毛?請到大新去!) which exhorted readers to participate in the event.<sup>103</sup> On 4 April, Zhang Leping in person promoted Song Qinglin's initiative through the pages of *Dagongbao*:

My anger and indignation [at the condition of homeless children] are the reasons why my pen never stops denouncing the condition of these humiliated and harmed children. My pen is at the service of these poor children! Although my technique has not matured, although my observations are still missing strength, nevertheless I love people and I hope that in the midst of thousands of difficulties our children's hearts can still be happy! (...) Madame Sun Yat-Sen, the director of the Children's Welfare Association, has organized the 'Sanmao Life Exhibition' in order to help those poor children who live like Sanmao. I feel sorry because my drawings are still not very good, especially the colorful ones, all of them have been painted while I was sick. But what can be better than to know that thanks to my drawings and the help of Madame Sun Yat-Sen many little Sanmao will receive a concrete benefit?<sup>104</sup>

All these events proved extremely successful. *Dagongbao* estimated that approximately 20 thousand people visited the exhibition. All the proceeds from the entrance tickets were donated to the Welfare Fund. During the event, Zhang Leping sold three hundred original plates of *The Wandering Life*, and thirty one-off watercolor plates representing the little hero (Fig.21).<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Dagongbao* (Shanghai Edition), 21 March 1949. *Dagong bao* was not the only newspaper to promote the event. For instance, also *Xinmin bao* wrote about the event on 4 April 1949.

<sup>104</sup> *Dagong bao* (Shanghai Edition), 4 April 1949.

<sup>105</sup> According to Feng Chuyin, in March 1949 Zhang Leping participated in a private meeting in Song Qingling's residence in Huaihai Zhong Road where he sold one of his water-colors to a Russian man for 800 dollars, later donated to the China Welfare Fund. See Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 21.





Fig. 20: Zhang Leping is portrayed while drawing the thirty sketches which will be sold for charity at the Sanmao Exhibition. *Dagongbao* (Shanghai Edition). 27 March 1949.



Fig. 21: Visitors at the Sanmao Playground organized by the China Welfare Fund Committee at the Great Wall Mall, 1949.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>106</sup> China Welfare Institute ed. (*Zhongguo fulihu bian*, 中國福利會編), *Zhongguo fulihui liushi Nian* 中國福利會六十年 [The Sixty Years of the China Welfare Institute] (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 1998), 48.

The 'Sanmao Life Exhibition' appeared to be an extraordinary opportunity to provide poor children with concrete help. Nevertheless, the organization of this event was not devoid from political significance. Song Qingling's decision to appoint Zhang Leping as sponsor for her charity organization was based both on the cartoonist's strong commitment to spreading public awareness of homeless children's issues, and on the criticism that the strips made towards the government. In fact, while charity was the main goal of the exhibition, the 'Sanmao Life Exhibition' also became an occasion for the further diffusion of the political message of *The Wandering Life*. The 'Sanmao Life Exhibition' was advertised in several newspapers, such as the Nationalist party's *Central Daily News* (*Zhongyang Ribao* 中央日報), which in an article entitled 'We have to make an effort for the sake of Sanmao's happiness!' (*Wei Sanmao de xinfu er nuli*, 為三毛的幸福而努力) invited readers to participate to the event organized by Song Qingling. The newspaper also pointed out that, in drawing *The Wandering Life*, Zhang Leping invited Chinese society to sympathize with homeless children and to donate money to rescue them, since he believed that in a happy society everybody should enjoy the same rights.<sup>107</sup>

While the *Central Daily News* highlighted only the philanthropic aims of *The Wandering Life*, other newspapers and magazines used the celebration of Children's Day and the opening of Song Qingling's charity event in order to criticize the way in which the Nationalist authorities were dealing with China's welfare. For instance, on the occasion of the opening of 'Sanmao Life Exhibition', *Dagongbao* published the already discussed 'Ideal and Reality' (Fig.19), one of the most critical strips of *The Wandering Life*. Furthermore, the newspaper dedicated several pages to the comments of journalists, intellectuals and social workers on the 'Sanmao Life Exhibition'. Liu Dewei, a renowned social worker connected with Chen Heqin's Shanghai Children's Welfare Promotion Association, contributed to the discussion with a powerful article entitled 'The importance of the Next Generation' (*Zhongshi xiayidai*, 重視下一代), where she explained how in recent years Chinese people had stopped taking care of children, showing a strong disregard for the future of the nation. However, the ultimate cause of people's general lack of interest in children's welfare was attributed to the government:

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<sup>107</sup>"Wei Sanmao de xinfu er nuli" 為三毛的幸福而努力) [We have to make an effort for the sake of Sanmao's happiness!], *Central Daily News* (*Zhongyang Ribao* 中央日報), 4 April 1949.

Of course the war is the first cause of the people's estrangement towards children. Nevertheless, if we look more closely we can see that the war cannot have eliminated totally the resolution of an entire country to up bring its children. At present the law in China isn't protecting children. In the governmental administration system, children do not appear in any plan at any level, central, province or city. As for charities, it is possible to say that there are some associations which are doing a good job for children. However, they don't keep in contact with each other, and sometime they don't take into consideration the most important issues. The government should be able to organize the activities, because without a plan the rest of the work is useless. Only the government has the money and the power to organize action for children.<sup>108</sup>

While Liu Dewei called for intervention by the Nationalist government, the editorial board of *Dagongbao* harshly criticized the Nationalists in an article entitled 'Thoughts on Children's Day' (*Ertongjie de gangxiang*, 兒童節的感想). In this case, the editorial board opened the article by praising *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* for denouncing the poor conditions of orphans in China. After a gentle introduction the article concluded with a strong political statement:

After their defeat, the Japanese increased the years of compulsory education from six to nine. While led by the Labour Party, Britain has restricted the distribution of bread, but to school children the government guarantees a hot meal, every child can drink a glass of milk per day; only after the children have drunk can the adults share what remains. Perhaps these are legends; maybe compulsory education is something which exists only on paper. But with no education, come vagrancy, lack of care, death from disease, and murder. Which other country apart from China wastes the new generation in this way? If we try to look for the main reason for this situation, perhaps we might think of the economic crisis; but if we look deeper we'll see that the cause is political turmoil (...). Today is Children's Day, and on the occasion of this event peace talks must start! For the good of millions of children, all the people connected to the dictatorship should look inside themselves. The life of the nation is

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<sup>108</sup> Liu Dewei, "Zhongshi xiayidai: wei ertongjie zuo" 重視下一代為兒童節作 [Value the Next Generations: written in occasion of Children's Day]). *Dagong bao*, 4 April 1949.

everlasting, but the actions of politicians will be blamed forever. Peace is the way, for the next generations, this war must end!<sup>109</sup>

These two articles expressed in words the message that Zhang Leping conveyed in his strips. By deploring the absence of a working welfare system for children, they fostered criticism of the Nationalist administration. In particular, *Dagongbao* called for the end of the civil war, blaming mostly the 'dictatorship' (which is the Nationalists) for continuing the conflict. Praising the welfare agenda of the British Labour Party, *Dagongbao* also declared its support for leftist political forces.<sup>110</sup>

By transforming his little hero into a street urchin Zhang Leping managed to educate his young readers, to collect funding for orphans and to criticize the GMD. The image of Sanmao was then employed outside the strips in charity events such as the 'Sanmao Life Exhibition', which also became an occasion for underlining the government's incompetence in helping those acclaimed as the future leaders of the nation. In this way, charity for orphans became a political weapon, thanks to which opponents of the Nationalist Party highlighted the government's inability to provide for China's children. These ideas were supported by *Dagongbao*, and they were also developed also in the cinematographic version of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*.

## **MAKING THE MOVIE: THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC VERSION OF *THE WANDERING LIFE OF SANMAO* AND THE RADICALIZATION OF ZHANG LEPING'S POLITICAL THOUGHT**

On 3 April 1949, a day before the opening of the 'Sanmao Life Exhibition', *Dagongbao* dedicated an entire page of its Shanghai edition to the production of the movie *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*. The film was introduced in a short article entitled 'Sanmao on the Silver Screen' (*Sanmao shang yinmu*, 三毛上銀幕):

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<sup>109</sup> *Dagong bao* editorial, "Ertongjie de gangxiang" 兒童節的感想 [Thoughts about the Children's Day], *Dagong bao*, 4 April 1949.

<sup>110</sup> A Labor Party was formed in the beginning of the twentieth century in China, see Stephen A. Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses: Nationalism and Labor in Shanghai, 1885-1927* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 71-75.

Sanmao becomes a movie. The Sanmao of the silver screen is interpreted by Wang Longji 王龍基 (who is not even ten years old) and it is produced by the Kunlun Company 崑崙公司 (*Kunlun Gongsi*). It is directed by Zhao Ming 趙明 and Yan Gong, the cameraman is Zhu Jinming 朱今明. On April 4, in the morning, they shot the first scene on the Bund. Sanmao was covered with a gunnysack (...). When the passers-by noticed the living Sanmao, they surrounded the scene, creating some problems for the shoot.<sup>111</sup>

Despite the claim of *Dagongbao*, the shooting of *The Wandering Life* started well before April 1949; the scene *Dagongbao* refers to was the first shot taking place outside the cinematographic studios.<sup>112</sup> In an interview released in 1984, the director Zhao Ming recalls that he had already started working on the movie already in autumn 1948.<sup>113</sup> Why did *Dagongbao* decide to advertise this film in April 1949? The article 'Sanmao on the Silver Screen' was published while *Dagongbao* was promoting the charity event 'Sanmao Life Exhibition'. Most probably, the editors of the newspaper decided to keep alive the interest of their readers alive by publishing more news about their favorite cartoon hero. Nevertheless, the decision to promote this film about Sanmao just before Children's Day had once again a political aim, since the Nationalist authorities censored the movie during its production precisely because it contained a particular scene connected with the celebrations of Children's Day. According to Zhao Ming, the release of the film was blocked by the municipal authorities, even if the economic problems of the Kunlun Studios might have played a role in the delayed release of the movie.<sup>114</sup> The story of the production and promotion of the cinematographic version of *The Wandering Life* will help us to shed light on the GMD's reception of Sanmao comic strips, and at the same time to understand the causes of the progressive radicalization of Zhang Leping's political thought.

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<sup>111</sup> *Dagong bao*, 3 April 1949.

<sup>112</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 26.

<sup>113</sup> Zhao Ming, "Sanmao liulang ji huigu yu suixiang" «三毛流浪記»回顧與隨想 ['Thoughts on "The Wandering Life of Sanmao"]], *Cinema Art*, *Dianying Yishu* 電影藝術, December 1984. According to the 1981 edition of 'History of the Development of Chinese Cinema', the shooting started in October 1948. Cheng Jihua 程季華, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi* 中國電影發展史 [The History of the Development of Chinese Cinema] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1981), 240.

<sup>114</sup> Zhao Ming, "Sanmao liulang ji huigu yu suixiang". According to Zhang Leping's son Zhang Weijun, the delay with the release of the movie was due also to the economic troubles of the Kunlun Studios. Interview with Zhang Weijun, December 2013.

What did the Nationalist Government think of Zhang Leping's strips, and why did the authorities oppose the release of the film? The strips of *The Wandering Life* had always been well received by the public, and the serial was acclaimed as a masterpiece by newspapers and public personalities. In contrast, in December 1947 *Central Daily News* published an article entitled 'Concerns about Sanmao' (*Guanhuai Sanmao*, 关怀三毛), in which the content of *The Wandering Life* was defined as 'Too brutal' (*Tai cancu*, 太残酷). The article claimed that, although society can be merciless (*wuqing*, 无情), people still have ethics, while Zhang Leping's strips failed to show the better side of society.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, the GMD never really tried to prevent Zhang Leping from publishing his strips. As we have seen, the party's newspaper *Central Daily News* even supported Song Qingling's 'Sanmao Life Exhibition'. Most probably, the authorities thought that trying to stop an event aimed at raising funding for homeless children would have been a quite an unpopular idea among Shanghai residents. It is undeniable however that from the end of 1948, the GMD became progressively more unfriendly towards Zhang Leping's work. The constant obstructions of the authorities in the production of the film of *The Wandering Life* are the best example of the GMD's hostility.

The authorities' interference in Zhang Leping's work originated in the increasingly closer contacts between *Dagongbao*'s editor Wang Yunsheng and the CCP. As we have seen, from the end of the War of Resistance the newspaper published several articles critical towards the GMD; yet *Dagongbao* was not associated with the CCP. According to historian Yang Kuisong, the situation had changed by the end of summer 1948, when intellectuals and public figures in Shanghai realized that the CCP would prevail in the conflict. Several members of Shanghai's political, intellectual and business elite strengthened their contacts with CCP underground members, supporting the party and trying to organize the takeover of the city.<sup>116</sup> Wang Yunsheng was one of them, but his decision was not taken lightly, since he feared for the survival of his newspaper under the possible new government. In October 1948, once the underground members of the CCP had passed him a message from Mao Zedong which assured him about the survival of *Dagongbao* in the case of a CCP victory, Wang Yunsheng decided to collaborate with the

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<sup>115</sup> Huang Ke, Gan Zhenhu and Chen Lei, *Lao Shanghai manhua*, 321. The article was originally published on 30 December 1947.

<sup>116</sup> Yang Kuisong, *Renbuzhu de "Guanhuai"*, 98.

Communists.<sup>117</sup> In the same month, Wang Yunsheng was accused by the *Central Daily News* of being a Soviet spy. Helped by the underground communists, the journalist left for Hong Kong, where he transformed the local edition of *Dagongbao* into a local supporter of the CCP.<sup>118</sup>

Since *Dagongbao* was at odds with the Nationalist Government, *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* could no longer be perceived by the GMD as an innocuous comic for children. Furthermore, the interest of Song Qingling herself an opponent of Chiang Kai-shek's political party – in Zhang Leping's work did not help the cartoonist.<sup>119</sup> Given the political background of *Dagongbao* and the content of Zhang's strips, it is not surprising that the news of a forthcoming cinematographic version of *The Wandering Life* produced by the left-wing Kunlun Studios was not well received by the nationalist authorities.

The announcement of a project for transform Zhang's comic serial into a film was released in July 1948 by the Hong Kong based *Cinema Forum* (*Dianying luntan*, 电影论坛). The magazine published a humoristic sketch by communist cartoonist Mi Gu titled 'The manner of a movie star: promotion of Brother Sanmao's first screen appearance'. The cartoon portrayed Sanmao dressed as a Hollywood star: he wears a suit, fancy sun glasses and he smokes a cigar (Fig. 22).

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>118</sup> Wang, "The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes," 238-239. For an overview of Wang Yunsheng's activities in *Dagong bao* in the years before and after the Liberation see Yang Kuisong, *Renbuzhu de "Guanhuai"*, 93-209.

<sup>119</sup> About Mi Gu see Gan Xianfeng, *Zhongguo Manhua Shi*, 255-261.



Fig. 22: Mi Gu. 'The Manner of a Movie Star: Promotion of Brother Sanmao's first screen Appearance', *Cinema Forum*, 2 July 1948.

The involvement of the Kunlun Cinematographic Studios in the realization of the movie confirmed that it was going to be politically engaged. The Kunlun Studios had been established in Shanghai in May 1947 as a substitute for a previous company called Lianhua Film Society (*Lianhua yingyi she*, 聯華影藝社), closed after the continuous interference of the Nationalist Party.<sup>120</sup> One of the main founders of the new studios was Yuan Hansheng 陽翰笙 (1902-1993), a left-wing screenwriter and movie director who had been the right-hand man of Zhou Enlai and Guo Moruo in the wartime propaganda campaign of the Second United Front against the Japanese.<sup>121</sup> Between 1947 and 1949, the Kunlun Studios produced several films, distinguished by strong leftist content and a special attention to social issues.<sup>122</sup> It was Yuan Hansheng in person who developed the first script of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*. However, director Zhao Ming changed it drastically since he believed it was too dramatic and too different from the

<sup>120</sup> Cheng Jihua, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 208

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-210



original strips. He rewrote the entire scenario trying to strike the right balance between laughter and tears, endorsing humoristic tones instead of dramatic ones. Zhao Ming claimed that they drew inspiration from Charlie Chaplin's movies for their version of *The Wandering Life*. The aim was to create a product which could be enjoyable for both educated watchers and simple people.<sup>123</sup> Their script followed the original content of the strips, but it also shared several themes with the cinematographic tradition of portraying orphans' stories which had become very popular in China in the 1920s and 1930s, and which Zhang Leping had contributed to popularizing.<sup>124</sup>

The film opened with Sanmao waking up on the streets in Shanghai. After following his unsuccessful attempts at finding an honest job, the film shows how the child falls into the hands of a couple of thieves, who transform him into a petty thief. Having escaped from the bandits, Sanmao is adopted by a wealthy woman, afraid of losing her husband because of her infertility. The rich couple dresses the child in fancy western-style clothes and renames Sanmao 'Sam'. Once the transformation of the little hero from street urchin into rich child is completed, the couple introduces him to the decadent life of the Shanghai elites. During a party in his honor, the child allows his orphan friends who still live on the street to enter the kitchen of the house and eat the food prepared for the party. After being discovered, the children wreak havoc in the house, causing panic among the upper-class guests. When the street urchins are finally thrown out, Sanmao decides to follow them. Before the eyes of the shocked rich guests, the little hero gets rid of his new expensive clothes, he declares that his name is Sanmao and not Sam, and then autonomously decides to go back to his vagrant life on the street.<sup>125</sup>

From the general plot of the film, we can see that director Zhao Ming slightly modified Sanmao's story, introducing themes already developed in pre-war leftist cinematography, such as the idea that, unless helped, homeless children could become criminal, or the astonishing difference between the lives of the rich and the poor. However, while in the original strips Zhang Leping showed how Sanmao enjoyed living for some time in a middle class family, the movie focused on harsh social criticism of the rich, described as selfish, wasteful individuals pretending to live

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<sup>123</sup> Zhao Ming, "Sanmao liulang ji huigu yu suixiang," 54.

<sup>124</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>125</sup> For a more detailed synopsis of the movie see Yomi Braester, "A Big Dying Bat," 417-421.

like American in Shanghai. The film shows how Sanmao refuses to live a comfortable life with the corrupt rich family, unwilling to conform to the westernized life-style of his step-family. In his eyes, the wealthy family did not adopt him to help him, but in order to satisfy their need to have a child. Instead of accepting Sanmao, they try to transform him into the son they desire, to the point of changing his name.

The movie presented a harsher criticism of the Chinese rich than the strips. Nevertheless, it shared with Zhang Leping's comic the idea of employing Children's Day as an occasion to underline social inequality among Shanghai residents. In one of the most poignant scenes of the movie, Shanghai children enjoy the celebrations in their honor all around the city. A group of Boy Scouts parades on the street under enormous GMD flags, while megaphones announce that 'Children are the future masters of the nation'. Attracted by the synchronized movements of the marching boys and intending to enjoy the celebration, Sanmao joins the parade, soon followed by other homeless children. The orphans, whose poor clothes stand in strong contrast with the Boy Scouts' polished look, start marching to the rhythm of the music, excitedly responding to the slogans in honor of the young Chinese citizens. The presence of homeless children among the order of the scouts does not pass unnoticed; soon a policeman intervenes in order to disperse the group. Dissatisfied, Sanmao decides to organize his own parade of street orphans, but his attempt is immediately suppressed by the police. Analyzing this scene, historian Yomi Braester pointed out that the parade showed a 'spatial demarcation of class', where the wealthier children can participate in the celebration, while Sanmao is 'limited to being an onlooker'.<sup>126</sup> Actually, the film remained faithful to Zhang Leping's political interpretation of Children's Day, underlining on one side the different treatment reserved for children from different social backgrounds; while on the other portraying the Nationalist government's inability to provide for poor children, and in this case even the authorities' tendency to treat homeless children as second class citizens.

The GMD did not appreciate the content of the movie. According to Zhao Ming, during the preparatory phase of the film, the producer received an anonymous threatening letter saying: 'If Sanmao carries on, you will have to watch your head'. A few days later, Zhang Leping, who

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<sup>126</sup> Braester, "A Big Dying Vat," 418.

actively contributed to the production of the movie (Fig. 23), also received the same message.<sup>127</sup> The crew decided to ignore the letters, and continued working. It is unclear whether the authorities knew about the content of the film, but certainly the GMD had good reasons to oppose its release, such as the political connection of *Dagongbao* with the CCP, the involvement of Kunlun Studios in the project, and the increasingly political content of Zhang Leping's strips. While the movie was being shot between the end of 1948 and spring 1949, *Dagongbao* was publishing fewer strips of *The Wandering Life* due to Zhang Leping's health problem, but the interest of the authorities in the movie demonstrated that they were well aware of the political content of this comic serial.



Fig. 23: Zhang Leping and child actor Wang Longji on the set of the movie of 'The Wandering Life of Sanmao', April 1949.<sup>128</sup>

As we have seen, although the movie could not be screened in public, in 1949 it was heavily promoted in *Dagongbao* and in other newspapers. In particular, the biography of the child-actor Wang Longji appeared in several magazines. The child, the son of an actor, was often compared

<sup>127</sup> Zhao Ming, "Sanmao liulang ji huigu yu suixiang," 55.

<sup>128</sup> Yang Guo, *Baishi Leping*, 48.

to Sanmao, for although he actually had a family; he had also suffered hunger and poverty during the War of Resistance.<sup>129</sup> As in the case of the strip, the promotion of the movie of *The Wandering Life* provided an opportunity to discuss children's welfare and the situation of orphans in China.

The cinematographic adaptation of Zhang Leping's comic serial was finally released in December 1949, two months after the establishment of the People's Republic. It is cited by several critics as one of the exemplary revolutionary movies by several critics.<sup>130</sup> Was the reference to Children's Day and its social criticism enough to make this film a classic of the communist revolution? Before being released, the film went through a process of revision; in particular the director was asked to add a new final scene incorporating footage from the actual parade of the People's Liberation Army entering Shanghai. This new end differed immensely from Zhang Leping's original story. *The Wandering Life* did not have a closing sequence in *Dagongbao*. The last strip published by the newspaper was 'Ideal and Reality' on the occasion of Children's Day. In the following years, however, the strip 'A Kaleidoscopic World' (*Daqian shijie*, 大千世界), originally published on 3 December 1948, was chosen as the closing image of the serial. In this strip, Sanmao stands puzzled in the middle of the street looking at the chaotic life of the city: in the lower right corner, a group of people march protesting against hunger; a man lies probably dead on the sidewalk where a group of children read *lianhuanhua*. In the buildings people perform everyday activities, like watering flowers or preparing dinner. On the other side of the street, some homeless people sit on the pavement, while a child follows a rich couple begging for money. A dancing party is taking place in the building above; at the same time a man is committing suicide by jumping from the roof. In the distance, it is possible to see a long queue of people probably waiting for food, while a group of protesters march aggressively towards a factory (Fig.24). This panel resembled the last dramatic image of *Sanmao Joins the Army*: also in this case the child is lost in the middle of the street, surrounded by a chaotic society unable to give him any sort of support.

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<sup>129</sup>Tian Mu 田木, "Yinmu shang de Sanmao" 银幕上的三毛 [Silver Screen Sanmao], *News Magazine, Xinwen Zazhi* 新聞雜誌, January 1949.

<sup>130</sup> See for instance Chen Jihua, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 208.

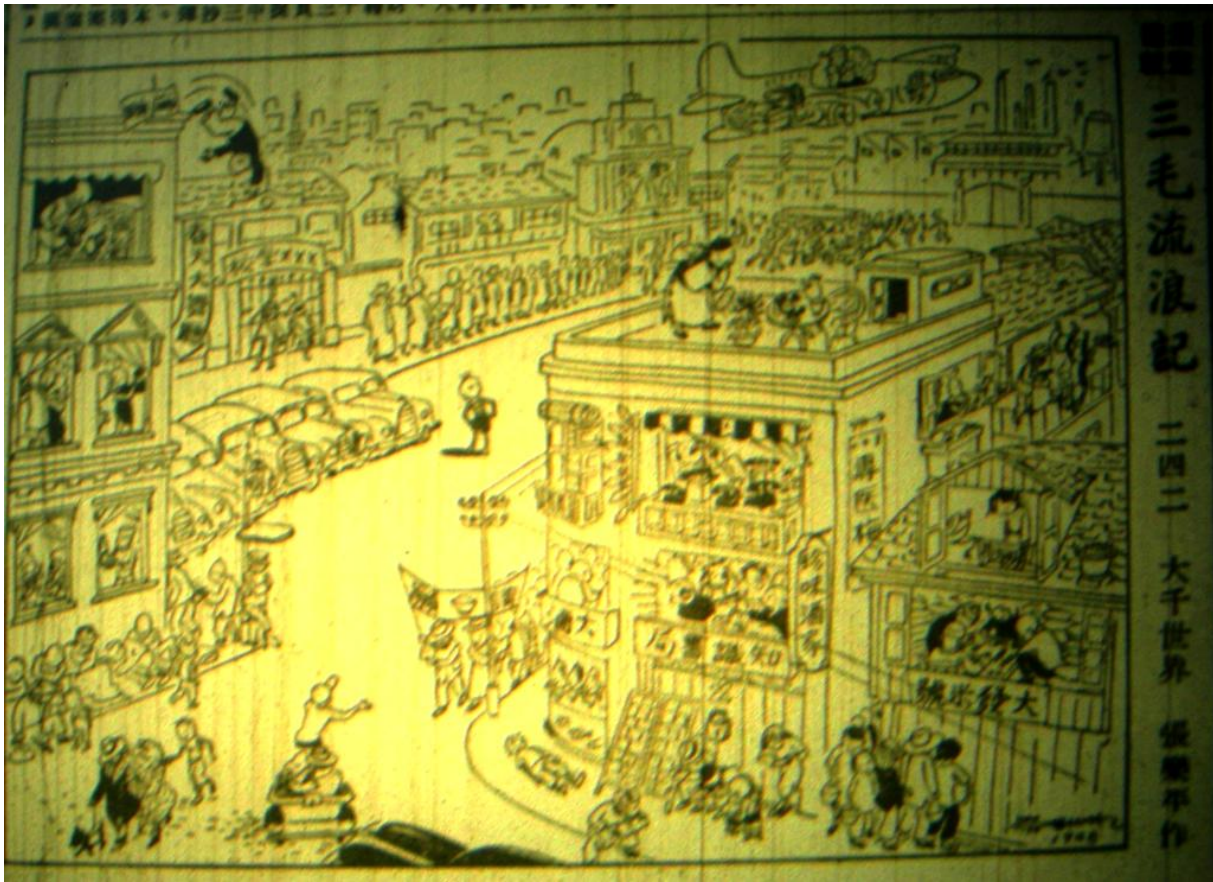


Fig 24: Zhang Leping. 'A Kaleidoscopic World', (*Daqian shijie*, 大千世界), *Dagongbao*, 3 December 1948

By contrast, the film of *The Wandering Life* closed with a happy ending. In its original version, the movie ended with Sanmao returning to his life on the street after refusing to conform to his step-family's lifestyle. In the new ending added after the Liberation, Sanmao witnesses the PLA's entrance into Shanghai. After the takeover of Shanghai on 25 May 1949, the PLA organized several commemorative parades around the city, always recorded by professional cameramen, stressing the population's warm welcome to the liberators.<sup>131</sup> For the new final scene of *The Wandering Life*, director Zhao Ming shot new sequences in the studio, mixing them with footage from the documentary of the actual PLA march. The director combined scenes from the actual parades – particularly soldiers carrying huge portraits of Mao and hundreds of red flags – with shots of Sanmao and his friends taken in the cinematographic studio. In the studio shot, a girl leading the *yangge* dances invites the homeless children to join the festivities.<sup>132</sup> Although the

<sup>131</sup> Braester, "A Big Dying Vat," 414.

<sup>132</sup> On *yangge* see Holm, *Art and Ideology*, 115-317.

homeless children are not able to follow the steps, they are welcomed by the young dancers. The movie closes with an overview of the original parade with a song praising the PLA as musical background.<sup>133</sup> In this way, the director created a direct visual comparison between the festivities for the Liberation and the Children's Day parade: the *yangge* performance is as joyful and colorful as the boy scouts' march was serious. Furthermore, while the Nationalist authorities excluded Sanmao from the celebration, the PLA members welcome children irrespective of their social background.

The new ending of the movie added new meaning to Zhang Leping's *lianhuanhua*. The original version of *The Wandering Life* called for political and social change without directly supporting the Communist Party, whereas the final version of the movie suggests a strong connection between the comic strips and the Communist Party. Certainly, Zhang Leping's participation in the production of the movie and the political support of his employer Wang Yunsheng for the CCP suggest that in the months before the Communist takeover the artist became more positive towards the CCP. Following his political radicalization, the strips he produced in April 1949 on the occasion of the 'Sanmao Life Exhibition' were also the most critical towards the Nationalists. As happened in the case of other public personalities in Shanghai (such as Wang Yunsheng) Zhang Leping became progressively more disillusioned with the GMD, and eventually he started supporting its stronger political opponent.

Despite Zhang Leping's sympathy for the CCP, the original strips of *The Wandering Life* cannot be considered as a product based on Communist ideology. Actually, it was Zhao Ming's movie, not the cartoon strip, that started the transformation of Sanmao into a hero of the CCP. By combining documentary and fiction the movie set the pattern for later representations of the Shanghai Liberation.<sup>134</sup> *The Wandering Life* owed its popularity to its cinematographic representation of the Liberation, to the point that in the 1950s Zhang Leping had to adapt his work to accord with the movie.

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<sup>133</sup> Braester, "A Big Dying Vat," 420.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

The story of the cinematographic transposition of *The Wandering Life* and the content of the film can be analyzed in the context of the changing political ideas of Zhang Leping and of the people involved in the production and distribution of the Sanmao story. The film not only criticized contemporary society and the Nationalist Party's politics, but can also be considered as the link which connecting Sanmao with the new political system. While the comic strips of *The Wandering Life* called for social justice and equal welfare, they did not directly support the CCP. In contrast, the last scene of the movie added after the Liberation showed Sanmao's happy life in new China, transforming *The Wandering Life* into a teleological narrative, in which Sanmao's plight was destined to be resolved from the beginning by the eventual triumph of the Communists. In this context, the film also played a key role in shaping the subsequent development of Zhang Leping's artistic production, whereby Sanmao was transformed into an icon of the Liberation.





## CHAPTER 5: SANMAO LIBERATED: ZHANG LEPING'S WORK IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (1949-1963)

On 27 May 1949, Zhang Leping witnessed with relief the PLA's entrance into Shanghai. Despite his poor health, he celebrated the event with his family watching soldiers parading in the city streets. Like many other artists and intellectuals, Zhang Leping was disillusioned with the Nationalists, and he was pleased by the possibility to collaborate with the CCP.<sup>1</sup> The artist could not know of the years of troubles awaiting him. People living at that time did not know to what extent in just a few years they were going to be affected by the policies of the new authorities.<sup>2</sup> However, he soon understood that his career and personal life depended on the ever-changing political situation inside and outside China. During the 1950s Zhang Leping continued his artistic career. As many of his colleagues, he had to adapt his work to the new art directives imposed by the CCP. Sanmao also changed drastically after 1949. Zhang Leping's strips starring the little hero attracted the attention of the authorities, bringing both positive and negative reactions: on the one hand, they acknowledged the popularity of Sanmao and the possible employment of his image for political purposes; on the other hand, Zhang Leping's strips contained problematic features that had to be eradicated. Despite criticism of the content of such serials as *The Wandering Life*, Sanmao was too popular to consider his outright ban from China's publishing world; on the contrary, the authorities decided to seize upon his image and use it for their own benefit. The little hero was to change in order to meet the needs of the readers of New China.

Scholars have drawn attention to the transformation of Sanmao after the establishment of the PRC. According to Rosen, Bock and Ching, after the Liberation 'Sanmao became a role model and an educator and ceased to be a critic,'<sup>3</sup> According to Farquhar *The Wandering Life* became a tool to compare the horror of the old society with Sanmao's comfortable life under Communism. In particular, she commented to the 'lack of any humour or narrative and the "flawless" Sanmao

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>2</sup>Link Perry, "The Crocodile Bird: Xiangsheng in the Early 1950s," in *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, ed. Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup>Rosen, Bock and Ching, "The Wandering Life of Sanmao," 124

is extremely dull'.<sup>4</sup> These analyses dismissed the strips produced during the 1950s as banal and unimportant, leaving several questions to be answered about the production, content, and change over time of the strips. How did the strips change after 1949 compared with those produced before? What did the new Sanmao comic serials tell us about the socio-political context in which they were produced? What political and artistic discussions propelled the changes to post-1949 Sanmao?

The production of cartoons and *lianhuanhua* during the 1950s has been analyzed by Chang-tai Hung in the context of the new political culture created by the party in the early years of the PRC. In his work, Hung highlighted the important role of visual arts in the dissemination of socialist ideology among the population. In particular, he analyzed how oil paintings were considered the most appropriate form of art for the laudatory representation of the history of the CCP, while cartoons and *lianhuanhua* sought to criticize the party's enemies by proposing a clear distinction between good and evil, opponents and friends. Hung described also how traditional *nianhua* were reinvented as educational tools by substituting folkloristic or religious emblems with patriotic figures designed to present new role models to the population.<sup>5</sup> In reality, the *Sanmao* strips published after 1949 fulfilled all these aims. Through the story of Sanmao, Zhang Leping managed to present to his readers an improved version of the history of the CCP; to criticize party's enemies; and even to make of his little hero a model child whose behaviour could inspire the new generations.

In this chapter, I show how during the 1950s and the 1960s the figure of Sanmao was selectively appropriated by the CCP to apply the party's teleological interpretation of history as a natural trajectory towards the victory of communism. Sanmao progressively served as a tool for teaching a sanitized version of the Chinese past, offering at the same time a key for the correct interpretation of the present. In this process, Zhang Leping gradually lost control over his cartoon character, who was being transformed into an icon of the Revolution. The changes applied to the figure of Sanmao were tightly connected to the professional and personal choices of Zhang Leping, who during the 1950s had to adjust to his new working conditions, which meant being

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<sup>4</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 211-212.

<sup>5</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 155-171.

constantly at the mercy of the ever-changing political situation and at times possibly on the verge of being attacked as a rightist. Through the analysis of Zhang Leping's strips from the 1950s and the discussions that surrounded their production, it is possible to understand the process that led the artist to redraw Sanmao's past, while becoming the reluctant creator of the little hero's future in the PRC.

## **CULTURE UNDER COMMUNISM: CARTOONS AND *LIANHUANHUA* DURING THE 1950S AND EARLY 1960S**

The establishment of the PRC in 1949 signaled the beginning of a new life for several Chinese artists such as Zhang Leping, who were to be deeply affected by the cultural policies introduced by the new government. The new cultural rules imposed by the CCP profoundly influenced Zhang Leping's work, and especially his new *Sanmao* comic serials. While on the one hand the artist was given the opportunity to continue his work as a leading cartoonist, on the other hand the CCP's constant monitoring of his production restrained his artistic freedom. To better comprehend why and how Zhang Leping's strips changed through the 1950s and the early 1960s, we need to understand how the establishment of the PRC revolutionized the life and production of Chinese intellectuals and artists, in particular, the effect of new cultural rules for the production of cartoons and *lianhuanhua*.

The political changes which took place after 1949 deeply influenced the production of visual arts, which had already held an important position in the CCP's political program already before the establishment of the PRC. The Yan'an period (1937-1947) was a crucial phase for the development of the party's revolutionary culture. In particular, Mao Zedong's 1942 speech about art and literature has been recognized as the beginning of the CCP's cultural policy.<sup>6</sup> Mao cited cartoons and *lianhuanhua* as useful tools for the propagation of socialist ideology because of their ability to make sophisticated content accessible to the masses.<sup>7</sup> It was on this occasion that Mao also defined the role of intellectuals and artists under Communist rule. The CCP leader made clear that art not only had to be accessible to the mass of workers, peasants and soldiers, but also had to be subordinated to the party's political agenda.

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<sup>6</sup> David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991), 91. The content of the speech was made public in October 1943.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

The art policies stated by Mao in Yan'an were essential for the development of artistic production during the 1950s. In July 1949, at the All- China Congress of Literary and Art Workers (*Zhonghua quanguo wenhua yishugongzuozhe shou jie daibiao dahui*, 中華全國文化藝術工作者首屆代表大會) in Beijing, Zhou Enlai gave a long speech, in which the premier outlined the most important issues for discussion among cultural workers, summarized by Andrews in five points: first, to harmonize the work between non-communist and communist artists; second, to understand that the mission of artists was to serve the people; third, to privilege popularization over the raising of standards; fourth, to reshape the old art; and finally, to make clear that artists had to take into consideration the needs of the whole country in their work.<sup>8</sup> It was on this occasion that woodcut artist Jiang Feng 江峯 (1910-1982) – one of the vice-chairmen of the All-China Art Workers Association – restated the importance of popular art forms, such as *lianhuanhua*, calendar posters and also cartoons for the popularization of the socialist message.<sup>9</sup>

On 5 June 1949, Zhang Leping participated to the First post Liberation Cultural Assembly (*Jiefang hou wenuajie di yi ci shengda jihui*, 解放後文化界第一次盛大集會), where the new mayor of the city Chen Yi 陳毅 (1901-1972) explained to 162 artists, educators, intellectuals, writers and movie directors the necessity of cooperating in reforming the arts for the construction of the new China.<sup>10</sup> Zhang Leping was also one of the 753 artists to participate in the All-China Congress of Literary and Art Workers, and later he became a member of the All-China Art Worker Association. On these occasions he had the opportunity to catch a sight of the forthcoming transformations which were going to affect the production of *lianhuanhua* and cartoons.

Cartoons were a popular form of art already in Yan'an, where many cartoonists worked for the CCP during the War of Resistance and the early years of the Civil War.<sup>11</sup> Political cartoons produced in Yan'an criticized the Japanese, the capitalist and imperialist forces, and especially

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 155.

<sup>10</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 48-49.

<sup>11</sup> Bi Keguan and Huang Yuanlin, *Zhongguo manhua shi*, 207-216.

the GMD authorities, which became the main target during the Civil War. Nevertheless, the relationship between party cadres and cartoonists was not always peaceful. On some occasions, cartoonists employed satire to criticize cadres for their laziness, ignorance of Marxist ideology and their social climbing.<sup>12</sup> By criticizing cadres, artists aimed to educate the population and cadres about ideological mistakes by denouncing the shortcomings of the system. Their works inspired a discussion about the employment of political satire in art and literature, a problem which Mao tackled in the Talks on Art and Literature in 1942. In his speech, Mao pointed out that satire was necessary to criticize the external enemies of the party, but he discouraged artists from attacking comrades with satirical art works. The Chairman set out three targets for satire: first, satire to attack the enemy; second, satire to address friends; and third, satire to attack one's own ranks. Satire about members of the party was considered counterproductive by the chairman, since by criticizing internal friends, artists could actually benefit external enemies.<sup>13</sup> As result, most of the cartoons portraying cadres in negative light were censored. However, as we will see, similar discussions about the employment of satire were still taking place among cartoonists after 1949.

Mao's views on satire were considered particularly important for the development of cartoons in the PRC.<sup>14</sup> Hung has pointed out that the most representative feature of socialist *manhua* was a clear differentiation between the good and the bad, enemies and friends.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the historian has shown how during the 1950s cartoons were mostly employed in order to attack the party's external and internal enemies. As for the external enemies, American soldiers became cartoonists' favorite targets, especially during the Korean War (1950-1953), when China fought against the US forces on the Korean Peninsula. During these years, intellectuals and artists became indispensable for disseminating anti-American and anti-imperialist slogans. As for internal enemies, cartoons attacked counterrevolutionaries, such as supporters of the GMD, members of secret societies and bourgeois intellectuals, especially the literary theorist Hu Feng

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 208-209.

<sup>13</sup> Altehenger, "A Socialist Satire," 91.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 91-92

<sup>15</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 159.

胡風 (1902-1985), who in 1954 dared to criticize the CCP's imposed political indoctrination and its effect on art and literature.<sup>16</sup>

While cartoonists were successful in their mission of attacking the CCP's enemies, the employment of satire for criticizing members of the party remained a delicate issue which was discussed in specialist magazines and major newspapers. In 1950 cartoonists established the magazine *Manhua* (*Cartoons*, 漫畫), intended to give to artists a space for discussion about the development of cartoon art in the PRC. The magazine was placed under the supervision of the Shanghai branch of the Chinese Artists Association (*Zhonghua renmin meishujia xiehui*). In 1951 Zhang Leping joined Mi Gu, Shen Tongheng and Zhang Wenyuan as one of the acting editors of the magazine.<sup>17</sup> While cartoonists followed Mao's rules on satire, in *Manhua* they published several articles discussing the problem of formalism and the possible employment of cartoons in the new China. On 6 June 1951, Mi Gu published in *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*) a cartoon entitled 'One of the old phenomena of the New Society' (*Xin shehui zhong de lao xianxiang zhi yi*, 新社會中的老現象之一), in which he criticized the tendency of a number of cadres to be late for political meetings. The publication of this strip was followed by a public discussion published in all the major newspapers in which several personalities stated their opinion about the utility of satirizing party members. *Liberation Daily* (*Jiefang Ribao* 解放日報), published the points of view of many people during the month of July 1951 in dedicated articles entitled 'Opinions about the cartoon "One of the old phenomena of the New Society"' (*Dui mahua 'Xin shehui zhong de lao xianxiang zhi yi' de yijian*, 對漫畫'新社會中的老現象之一的意見). While some of the writers welcomed Mi Gu's criticism of the cadres claiming that his cartoon showed a real problem which had to be solved, others stated that satire was not the method to solve this sort of problem, since it underlined cadres' shortcomings without offering solutions.<sup>18</sup> In the end, Mi Gu's idea of criticizing cadres was considered inappropriate, and cartoonists were discouraged from publishing similar cartoons.

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<sup>16</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 155-171.

<sup>17</sup> Altehenger, "A Socialist Satire," 88.

<sup>18</sup> "Dui mahua 'Xin shehui zhong de lao xianxiang zhi yi' de yijian," 對漫畫'新社會中的老現象之一'的意見 [Opinions about the cartoon 'One of the old phenomenon of the New Society']. *Liberation Daily*, 3 July 1951.

After the end of the Korean War in 1953, cartoonists were asked to publish laudatory images about the party's plan to start a gradual shift towards socialism, which was based on rapid industrialization and a speed-up in the creation of agricultural cooperatives.<sup>19</sup> In these years, artistic production came under the control of the Propaganda Department of the CCP.<sup>20</sup> By 1954, the authorities still believed that artists and intellectuals had not achieved political consciousness and that they still displayed an unhealthy independence of mind. In 1955 this led to the campaign against Hu Feng, which many cartoonists supported by producing dedicated satirical cartoons.<sup>21</sup> A year later, cartoonists were given the opportunity to speak their mind during the Hundred Flowers Campaign (*Bai hua yundong*, 百花運動). Concerned about the growing tensions between the party and artists, on 25 April 1956 Mao called for greater artistic freedom, by encouraging intellectuals and non-Communists to speak freely. Cartoonists were among those who during the Hundred Flowers Campaign expressed their disappointment with the contemporary state of art production in China. According to Altehenger, China's leading cartoonists pointed out two main problems which they considered most damaging for their artistic production: firstly, there was no clear guidance for the production of cartoons, since artists were on the one hand compelled to produce original cartoons, while on the other the subjects of their cartoons were attentively monitored; secondly, party officials in charge for monitoring their production were absolutely ignorant about cartoon theory, and did not understand the aims and techniques of political satire.<sup>22</sup> During the Hundred Flowers Campaign, cartoonists, among them Zhang Leping, resumed publishing satirical images criticizing cadres.

This period of freedom ended abruptly in mid-1957, with the beginning of the Anti-Rightist Campaign (*Fan you yundong*, 反右運動), which brought persecution to half a million people, followed by the reestablishment of party control over the country's artistic and intellectual production.<sup>23</sup> The magazine *Manhua* was accused of nurturing 'poisonous weeds', while editor Sheng Tongheng was accused of being a rightist. Editor-in-chief Mi Gu engaged in public self-

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<sup>19</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 181.

<sup>22</sup> Altehenger, "A Socialist Satire," 95.

<sup>23</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 4.

criticism and changed the focus of the magazine.<sup>24</sup> The Anti-Rightist Campaign signalled the end of cartoonists' attempts to keep control over their artistic production. When in 1958 Mao pushed for breakneck industrialization and collectivization, the so-called Great Leap Forward (*Da yue jin*, 大躍進) (1958-1961), *Manhua* and most of Chinese cartoonists followed the regulations of the party, which called for the production of laudatory images which could educate the population about the benefits of a developed economy and collectivization.

While cartoons were often considered controversial by the party because of their satirical nature, under the PRC *lianhuanhua* were regarded as a more suitable art form for the education of the masses.<sup>25</sup> Despite the fact that the content of many of the picture story books on the market was considered feudal and superstitious, at the All China Congress of Literary and Art Workers on July 1949, *lianhuanhua* were pronounced to be a form of popular art that could help the party to spread socialist ideology and mobilize the population. During the congress, it was stated that in order to reform *lianhuanhua* art workers had to train artists both ideologically and technically, to boost the production of new stories inspired by socialist ideology. In 1950, the Ministry of Education founded the Mass Pictorial Press (*Dazhong tuhua chubanshe*, 大眾圖畫出版社) in order to publish new revolutionary *lianhuanhua*, with the aim of spreading the socialist message among the citizens, especially children, women and workers.<sup>26</sup> In the same year, in Shanghai a consortium of 190 minor publishers was created under the control of the All China Art Workers, which regulated the didactic qualities of the new *lianhuanhua*.<sup>27</sup> Between 1951 and 1952, the Shanghai Municipal Cultural Bureau organized special training sessions for *lianhuanhua* artists in order to help them to improve their technical skills and ideological knowledge.<sup>28</sup> In the early 1950s, the new picture-story books contained edifying stories of land reform and references to the Korean War.<sup>29</sup> The main characters of the new stories were heroic soldiers, young pioneers, dedicated peasants and workers, who were raised to the status of role models for coming generations.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Altehenger, "A Socialist Satire," 97-98.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>26</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 157.

<sup>27</sup> Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 70

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 71

<sup>30</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 169-171.



As in the case of cartoons, the end of the Korean War and the preparation of a five-year economic development plan deeply influenced the methods of production and the content of new *lianhuanhua*. In 1953, *lianhuanhua* artists were criticized for not writing the text of their stories but drawing inspiration from movies instead. As a result, between 1954 and 1955 picture-story books contained numerous references to historical events, but also to folk tales and Chinese mythology, criticized just few years later for featuring too many ghosts, demons and old-style costumes.<sup>31</sup> Already before the Hundred Flowers Campaign, all the artists and editors involved in the production of *lianhuanhua* were working under the Shanghai's People's Art Publishing, which had the complete control over the content and production of picture-story books in the city.<sup>32</sup> The late 1950s and the early 1960s were marked by an increasing interest in raising the standard of drawing techniques. The *lianhuanhua* published in this period are still considered as masterpieces in the genre. They presented both contemporary themes and traditional stories: for instance, while *Great Change of a Mountain Village* (1963) spoke about the communization of a village, *Monkey Beats the White-boned Demon* (1963) was based on one episode of the Ming classic *Journey to the West*. What these works shared was the outstanding quality of the illustrations.<sup>33</sup>

The life and artistic production of Zhang Leping between 1950 and the early 1960s were influenced by policies and discussions relating to both cartoons and *lianhuanhua*. While he continued his career as a cartoonist working as an editor of *Manhua* and at *Liberation Daily*, in these years he also produced several *lianhuanhua* and illustrations for children. The regulations on the employment of satire and the educational role of *lianhuanhua* had a profound impact especially on his comic character Sanmao, who from a severe critique of contemporary society was progressively transformed into a model child.

### **CRITICIZING *THE WANDERING LIFE*, APPROPRIATING SANMAO**

In the early months of 1950, Sanmao reappeared on the pages of *Dagongbao*, where Zhang Leping published 'Sanmao Buys Government Bonds' (*Sanmao Mai Gongzhai*, 三毛買公債), a

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<sup>31</sup> Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 129-130.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 248-250.

series of strips inviting people to invest their money in the reconstruction of their country (Fig.1).<sup>34</sup> In February of the same year, *Dagongbao* also published a series of Sanmao's *nianhua* celebrating the first New Year of the People's Republic of China.<sup>35</sup> Despite his reappearance in the press, Zhang Leping's hero was not exempt from CCP criticism; indeed, in the early 1950s the publication of old and new Sanmao comic serials was seriously jeopardized by party authorities. The problem was that Zhang Leping's old strips did not fit the new rules about artistic production. What kind of criticism was directed at Zhang Leping's popular strips? An understanding of the criticisms made of the pre-Liberation *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* is essential in order to understand the development of Zhang Leping's work and his subsequent reaction to the party interference in his work.



Fig. 1: Zhang Leping drawing 'Sanmao Buys National Bonds' with his wife and his first four children, Shanghai 1950.<sup>36</sup>

After 1949, Zhang Leping's most popular works remained *Sanmao Joins the Army* and *The Wandering Life*, but *Sanmao Joins the Army* was considered inappropriate and was immediately

<sup>34</sup> Feng Chuying, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 49.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 49

banned from the market by the All China Art Workers Association, which had to approve the content of old and new *lianhuanhua* before allowing their publication.<sup>37</sup> A collection of reviews of more than 200 *lianhuanhua* published between 1949 and 1951 is conserved in the Beijing Municipal Archive. Each review presents the title of the comic, the name of the author, the price of the volume and the name of the publishing house. Furthermore, each review contains information about the content of the *lianhuanhua* (*zhuyao neirong*, 主要內容) and its weaknesses (*quedian*, 缺點), identified on the basis of its political or technical mistakes. Furthermore, each table gives information about the possible readers of the comic. In this survey only *The Wandering Life* appeared, while *Sanmao Joins the Army* is never mentioned.<sup>38</sup> It would appear that, although in this comic serial it was the Nationalist army that was portrayed in a negative manner, the authorities found the strips unpatriotic and confusing, and therefore not fit for publication for publication.<sup>39</sup>

The story of *The Wandering Life* was much more complicated. Farquhar has claimed that after 1949, Zhang Leping's masterpiece was frequently reprinted as 'part of children's continuing education for it served as a comparison between life in the old society and life in New Communist China'.<sup>40</sup> Although *The Wandering Life* was republished at least three times during the 1950s, and was employed to show the shortcomings of China before the Liberation, the serial was subjected to harsh criticism, which led to the alteration of its content and meaning. As a result, the three versions of *The Wandering Life* published in the 1950s were quite different one from another. In his new strips, Zhang Leping tried to remedy the problems which authorities had identified in *The Wandering Life*.

After 1949, the content of *The Wandering Life* was analyzed in detail by party authorities and by Shanghai artists collaborating with the new government. Interestingly, the first public discussion on the content and future of *Sanmao* comics was based on the content of the cinematographic version of the orphan's story rather than on the original *Dagongbao* strips. In June 1949, the

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<sup>37</sup> Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 70-71.

<sup>38</sup> Beijing Municipal Archive: 008-002-0015. "Xin lianhuanhua cha jilu biao" 新連環畫審查記錄表 [Collection of the investigation on the new *lianhuanhua*], 1949-1951.

<sup>39</sup> The publication of *Sanmao Joins the Army* resumed only in 1983. These strips were also banned in Taiwan, where they were published again only in 1987. See Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 211.

cinema magazine *New Positions on Cinema and Opera* (*Yingju Xinde*, 影劇新地) published the account of an official discussion between several movie critics and art workers about the content of the movie *The Wandering Life*. Zhang Leping also participated in the debate, even if he left early due to other work obligations.<sup>41</sup> As pointed out by the moderator, the meeting aimed to clarify how the content of movies should change under the CCP government: 'Our criticism might be extremely harsh, but our purpose is to enable cinematographic production in New China to take great steps forwards on its way to serving soldiers, peasants and workers'.<sup>42</sup> The discussants appreciated the general content of the movie, claiming that it succeeded in achieving various purposes. For instance, they approved the choice of the main actor Wang Longji, they liked the music, the realism of the setting and the high technical quality of music recording. However, despite all the positive qualities of the movie, they were extremely critical towards Sanmao's behavior and some elements of the plot.

The film was criticized for six reasons. Firstly, neither Sanmao's social background nor the reasons for his wandering were clearly emphasized. This problem led to the a second one; Sanmao's social class was not well defined, and the child often behaved like a beggar, a member of the social category of 'vagrants', believed to be unable to reach class consciousness by the CCP.<sup>43</sup> The third problem was related to the violent acts performed between members of the same social class. The fourth reason for criticism came from the unbalanced division of the storyline, since the time Sanmao spends with the rich family seemed too long and was unrelated to the rest of the plot. Finally, although the decision to add the footage of the PLA parade in Shanghai was highly appreciated, the Liberation happened too fast in the movie, without any explanation on the mechanisms which led to this important event.<sup>44</sup>

Zhang Leping briefly intervened in the discussion, pointing out that the plot of the movie and its representation of Sanmao was slightly different from his original comic strips:

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<sup>41</sup> Information reported in the article.

<sup>42</sup> Magazine Unit ed., "Sanmao Liulang ji zuotan" 三毛流浪記座談 [Discussion about the 'The Wandering Life of Sanmao'], *Yingju Xinde*, 影劇新地 [*New Positions on Cinema and Opera*], Issues 6, June 1949, 8-9.

<sup>43</sup> Beggars together with gamblers, prostitutes, fortune tellers and peddlers were persecuted by the CCP already in the Yan'an years. See Holm, *Art and Ideology*, 19.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

It was an honor for me to have my work *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* adapted for the silver screen. Originally, the cartoon was designed to be divided into several separate pieces, which *Dagongbao* published daily; while in the movie all the pieces were put together into a story. In my original script, Sanmao's parents were killed during the civil war, therefore he started wandering from one place to another. Sanmao is very stubborn, but he is a very good child who doesn't agree to do bad things, he is not like a beggar, he is struggling for life. This was my original concept. But after the movie was produced, I felt regret, because in the movie Sanmao behaves like a beggar who doesn't wish for progress, and this was different from my original work. Furthermore, also the other characters are different. I was not really involved in the production of the movie, so I hope others can present their ideas.<sup>45</sup>

In his speech Zhang Leping did not use words and concepts typical of Marxist ideology, such as 'class struggle' or 'class enemies', but he presented his ideas without getting engaged in ideological matters. From his words, we can see that he was still not familiar with the language and politics of the CCP. Certainly, from his words it seems that after so much criticism the artist was trying to distance himself from the production of the movie, by claiming that it differed greatly from his original strips. Despite criticism, the movie was finally released in movie theaters in September 1949. *Liberation Daily* published daily advertisements through the months of October and November 1949. The advertisement claimed: 'Sanmao wanders about in a desperate plight; he is left orphaned and lonely. He struggles against his situation, seeking survival without yielding' (*Sanmao ta dianpeiliuli gukulinding. Sanmao ta fankangxianshi qiushengbuqu*, 三毛他顛沛流離孤苦伶仃三毛他反抗現實求生不屈) (Fig. 2).

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<sup>45</sup> Magazine Unit ed., "Sanmao liulang ji zuotan," *Yingju Xinde*, 8.

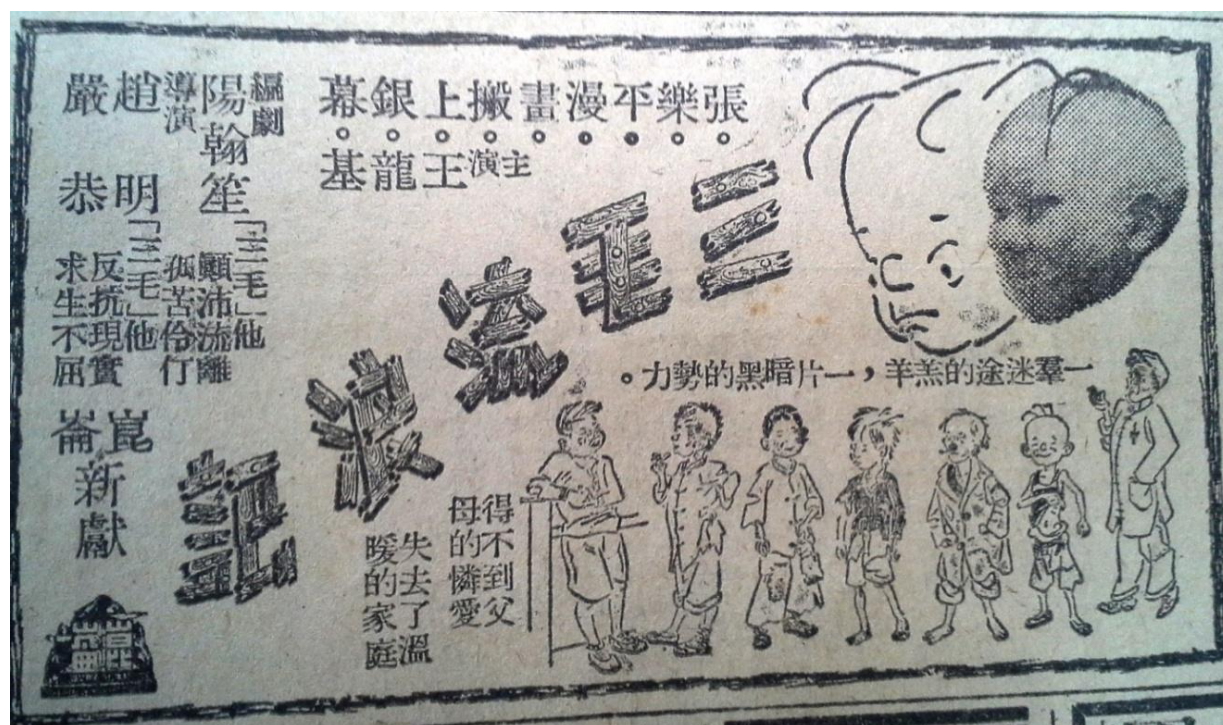


Fig. 2: Zhang Leping. Advertisement for the movie of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* published in *Liberation Daily* in October 1949.

In spite of Zhang Leping's attempt to defend the content of his serial, the strips of *The Wandering Life* were also criticized. Although in the early 1950s the artist was a respected cartoonist, his famous comic character Sanmao seriously risked disappearing from the pages of newspapers and magazines. On 23 May 1950, the Shanghai Art Workers Associations organized a meeting completely dedicated to Sanmao's future.<sup>46</sup> The group – composed by influential personalities such as cartoonist Mi Gu, writer and expert on children's literature Chen Bochui and Zhang Leping himself – singled out the same problems already quoted in the round-table about the Kunlun Studio film: Sanmao did not have a clear class background; he was suspected of being a beggar, and despite the cartoon's critique of the 'old society', it did not show any examples of class struggle. Two more problems arose from this discussion: since the child never grew old, the comic strips did not obey the rule of realism stated at the All- China Congress of Literary and Art Workers. Furthermore, in *The Wandering Life* the child did not reject the

<sup>46</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 50.

possibility of spending some leisure time in a bourgeois family, a behaviour that could not be accepted.<sup>47</sup>

The harsh criticism leveled at Zhang Leping's strips jeopardized the possible republishing of *The Wandering Life* as well as the 'survival' of Sanmao. Since so many problems were identified in the story, how could the comic continue to circulate in public? Zhang Leping in person intervened in order to 'save' his little hero. The artist participated in all the round-tables in which his work was discussed, and as appears from the article he wrote for *Wehui bao* during the Hundred Flower Campaign when, as many other artists and intellectuals, he felt free to speak his mind about his recent work, he was not pleased with the accusations it received:

After the Liberation, readers were concerned about Sanmao, since they wanted me to draw a story about his new adventures. Therefore, I wanted to start drawing again for the general public. However, since my experience in the new society was limited and I did not trust myself, I organized at least three meetings with some comrades asking for their help. In this period, I heard many discussions about Sanmao, some of which really influenced my innermost feelings. One said: 'Sanmao is a vagrant child, a vagrant proletarian; it is not worthwhile drawing him anymore'. Another said: 'Sanmao is too skinny, his look can fit only the old society, furthermore these three hairs of his look as if they lack nourishment; maybe it is worthwhile to carry on drawing his adventures, but in this case his hair should grow, he should get fatter, and he should get a new look'. In fact, in those days, even I could not get fat. Another man said: 'You have been drawing Sanmao for more than ten years, he should be a grown up man by now! Probably he is already too old to be a member of the China Youth Corps! If you don't make him grow up, he is going to be against nature!'. All these ideas left me very confused, and they made me feel very upset. There is even something more serious, later on in 1952 during the rectification of incorrect works in the Shanghai art world, a comrade said that the Wandering Life of Sanmao was like The Life of Wu Xun (*Wu xun zhuan*, 武訓傳),<sup>48</sup> a

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>48</sup> *The Life of Wu Xun* was a movie produced in 1950 by Kunlun Film Studio. It tells the story of Wu Xun, a beggar who collected money for years and then used it to build a public school for children. The movie was well received, but in 1951 it was harshly criticized and then censored.



view that made me even more confused, but I couldn't speak my mind, I couldn't contradict him, and as a result I could not sleep for days. Finally, I picked up courage and I went to speak with comrade Xia Yan, who really supported me. He wrote an introduction praising my work and made me publish my work again, he brought me back to life.<sup>49</sup>

From his words, the artist seems to understand that his comic strips do not fit the rules imposed by the party, and he seems willing to reform his work. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that Zhang Leping was not ready to let Sanmao be censored. The artist thought that most of the accusations made about his cartoon hero were unfounded: Sanmao was not a beggar, but a poor orphan trying to survive in the city; the little hero could not be healthy, since he could not afford food; furthermore, he could not become an adult without losing those distinguishing features which made of him Shanghai's most popular comic character. Zhang's declaration showed also that these critics completely overlooked the most interesting element of Sanmao's story, which was the author's harsh critique of contemporary Chinese society, which seemed to have lost its sense of humanity.

Both the cinematographic version and the comic strips of *The Wandering Life* were accused of not following the canon of socialist realism. 'Socialist realism', a term introduced in Soviet Union by Gorky in 1934, was supposed 'to be the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development with the aim of ideologically training people in the spirit of socialism'.<sup>50</sup> One of main aims of socialist realism was to systematize reality by showing a perfected version of society under socialism. By illustrating the power of socialism to create change, artworks inspired by socialist realism collaborated in the transformation of citizens into new socialist persons.<sup>51</sup> Also for this reason, the main characters of socialist realist novels, paintings and operas were always model heroes, ready to sacrifice themselves for the socialist cause. When the CCP authorities started their new cultural policies in Yan'an, they followed this Soviet model, which they also developed after 1949. Clearly, *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*

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<sup>49</sup> Zhang Leping, "Sanmao Hegu!" 三毛何辜! [How come Sanmao is Guilty?], *Wenhui bao*, 18 May 1957.

<sup>50</sup> Richard King, "Socialist Cultural Revolution," in *The Oxford Handbook of History of Communism* ed. Stephen Anthony Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 546.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 547.



could not be considered as a masterpiece of socialist realism. As critics pointed out, Sanmao was far from being a model for his public. He was not a worker, a peasant or a soldier, but a member of the so-called lumpen-proletariat, those people from the lower class who were unlikely to achieve class consciousness. As we have seen, vagrant children like Sanmao were often considered to act under the influence of criminals, gangs and secret societies, a world that the CCP planned to extirpate from New China. By supporting a character like Sanmao the CCP authorities feared to spread the wrong message among the population, who might sympathize with these outcast members of society.

Despite criticism, Sanmao survived, also thanks to the intercession of powerful personalities inside the party. In the text mentioned previously, Zhang Leping commended how he asked famous dramatist Xia Yan to help him to rescue his work from the criticism of other art workers.<sup>52</sup> Thanks to Xia Yan, a long-time member of the CCP, *The Wandering Life* was reprinted in 1950 by Early Youth and Children Press (*Shaonian ertong chubanshe*, 少年兒童出版社). As pointed out by Zhang, the dramatist wrote an outstanding introduction to the comic serial, in which he underlined the popularity of Sanmao and the artist's skill in describing the problems of pre-Liberation China:

Sanmao is the most popular fictional character among Shanghai residents. Not only children know him, love him, and empathize with him, but also their parents. Their teachers speak of Sanmao not as a fictional character created by the pen of an artist, but as a real child whom they sympathize with and love. Sanmao is a character created by an artist, however he is able to attract the welcome, sympathy and love of a large public, to the point that he is regarded as a real person, inspiring the concern of the public. It is said that there are people writing to the newspaper publishing Sanmao showing their willingness to donate money and help in order to solve his problems. This is certainly a great success and an honor for the artist. Sanmao's problems are based on social and political problems, therefore in the dark period which preceded the Liberation, the writer

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<sup>52</sup> During the Civil War, playwright Xia Yan was one of the leading members of the underground CCP in Shanghai. He supported the underground cartoonists in 1948, and he was a prominent art and movie critique. See Altehenger, "A Socialist Satire," 83.

followed every word and deed of Sanmao, as a protest and a denunciation of a society which had always proved to be compassionate towards the innocent and the weak, but which gradually became irrational and man-eating. This is the reason why the artist took the knowledge of this cruel life as the starting point, made contact with its essence, and started to feel disgusted and hostile towards this brutal system. At the same time we believe that, if the creator of Sanmao had not fought against the cruel reality of life, but had instead build a fantasy story, children wouldn't have woken up early in the morning to buy the newspaper and read his strips. It is worth to rejoicing now, because this dark time of Sanmao's life is over. Old society transformed men into ghosts, while new society transforms ghosts into men again. Sanmao is kind-hearted, courageous, he survived a lot of hardships; therefore we are now waiting to see his development and progress in the new society.<sup>53</sup>

Xia Yan's support for Sanmao seemed to have played a decisive role in for the survival of the little hero. In his introduction, the dramatist defended both Zhang Leping and Sanmao, contesting the criticism made of *The Wandering Life*. Firstly, he highlighted the main characteristic which had made Sanmao unique: although he was a fictional character, readers responded to him as if he was a real child. This distinctive feature made the little hero an irreplaceable personality, whose age, behavior and story could be replaced without altering the unique relationship between Sanmao and his fans. Secondly, Xia Yan explained how Sanmao, as a child living in a cruel society, could be considered as the embodiment of China's problems before the Liberation. For this reason, he could be a model child, but reflected in his appearance and behavior many of the shortcomings of pre-Liberation Chinese society. Finally, the dramatist praised Zhang Leping for courageously describing the Chinese people's weaknesses, analyzing through Sanmao's experience the pitfalls of a political system which transformed them into 'ghosts'. With his comments, Xia Yan managed to highlight the positive qualities of *The Wandering Life*, underplaying those characteristics which did not fit the CCP art directives. At the end of his introduction, the dramatist also gave also a hint about the possible future

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<sup>53</sup> Xia Yan, "Sanmao liulang ji quanji daixu" 三毛流浪記全集代序 [Preface to the collected work of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*], 20 January 1950.

development of Zhang Leping's cartoon saga: now that China is liberated, is time for Sanmao to become a member of the new society.

Thanks to Xia Yan's intervention, *The Wandering Life* was not banned from the market, although criticism towards these strips never ended. In the official survey conducted in the early 1950s on more than 200 *lianhuanhua* published after 1949, *The Wandering Life* was criticized because Sanmao 'wanders about the street without any destination or any project' (*Sanmao wumudide wu de jihua zai jieshaq liulang*, 三毛無目的無計劃地在街上流浪), and its content was too similar to the homonymous movie. And yet, in the survey Zhang Leping's comic serial was still considered a suitable story for readers.<sup>54</sup>

Not even Sanmao's ability to rally people to help poor children escaped condemnation. The editor of *Dagongbao* Wang Yunsheng mentioned to Zhang Leping how during a meeting in a middle school in Hongkou district in Shanghai he was criticized by the director of the school for quoting *The Wandering Life* while speaking about the necessity to help all those little Sanmao still living on the street. Supposedly, the director said: 'We members of the proletariat would never accept capitalists' dirty money'.<sup>55</sup> The director's reaction was related both to the discussion surrounding Sanmao's social class and the party's effort to annihilate private charity foundations often headed by wealthy bourgeois.<sup>56</sup> As we will see, despite criticism *The Wandering Life* remained available during the 1950s, but its content was altered in several ways.

## ZHANG LEPING'S NEW STRIPS: THE CASE OF SANMAO STANDS UP

After several roundtables and thanks to intervention of Xia Yan, in 1951 Sanmao made his reappearance in two short comic serials: *Sanmao's Denunciation* (*Sanmao de kongsu*, 三毛的控訴) published in *Dagongbao* between 1 January and 3 February; and *Sanmao Stands Up* (*Sanmao fanshen ji*, 三毛翻身記) in *Liberation Daily* (*Jiefang Ribao*, 解放日報) between 5 May and 23 July. These two serials were evidently shorter than Zhang Leping's pre-1949 comics:

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<sup>54</sup> Beijing Municipal Archive: 008-002-0015. "Xin lianhuanhua cha jilu biao" 新連環畫審查記錄表 [Collection of the investigation on the New *Lianhuanhua*], 1949-1951.

<sup>55</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 51.

<sup>56</sup> Nara Dillon, "New Democracy and the Demise of private Charity in Shanghai," in *Dilemmas of Victory*. ed. Brown and Pickovicz, 80-102.

*Sanmao's Denunciation* was composed of only 18 strips, while *Sanmao Stands Up* contained 65 images. Despite their conciseness, Sanmao's new adventures are very meaningful for an understanding of the CCP's appropriation of the iconic figure of Zhang Leping's little hero. Obviously, after the harsh criticism received in 1950, the artist had to adapt his work to the party's cultural rules. Scholars have often overlooked these new strips, claiming that all the work published during the 1950s was 'extremely dull', since in them Zhang Leping transformed Sanmao into a flawless young pioneer, showing his happy life in New China.<sup>57</sup> This interpretation of Zhang's post 1949 comics betrays lack of knowledge of the rich visual material produced by the artist in the early 1950s. A more attentive analysis of *Sanmao Stands Up* reveals that Zhang Leping did not limit himself to following Xia Yan's suggestion of making his little hero 'progress in the new society'; in fact, before transforming Sanmao into a model child living in New China, the artist used his new strips in order to perform a retroactive correction of the content of his pre-Liberation strips, adjusting them to the contemporary political agenda of the CCP.

*Sanmao Stands Up* was the longer and more interesting of Zhang Leping's serials produced in 1951. The serial follows Sanmao's life during the War of Resistance, the Civil War and the early days after the Liberation. Most of the story takes place in the same timeframe as *The Wandering Life*, but the content is very different from the earlier strips. In *Sanmao Stands Up*, Zhang Leping fulfilled two main aims: firstly, by representing an alternative version of Sanmao's life before the Liberation, Zhang Leping deliberately adjusted the story of Sanmao to the rules of socialist realism; secondly, by criticizing American soldiers' conduct during the Civil War, the new strips supported China's military intervention in Korea. *Sanmao Stands Up*, was only the first step of the party's retroactive appropriation of Sanmao's prewar story, and of the coming transformation of the little hero into a member of the new society.

The serial *Sanmao Stands Up* opened with the strip 'Mass Accusation Session' (*Gongsu dahui* 控訴大會), a public meeting normally described as half-staged events organized by the state, in which people were invited to accuse specific class-enemies. While mass accusation sessions were often organized events with stage props, scripts and dramatic stories, these meetings could

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<sup>57</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 212. Rosen, Bock and Ching, "The Wandering Life of Sanmao," 126-127.

be emotionally engaging for the public, and they could be successful in mobilizing the population against state-enemies.<sup>58</sup> In the first strip, the little hero sits in a large room together with several other people all with grim expressions on their faces. The banner hanging on the wall quotes: 'Denunciation Meeting to oppose the US arming the Japanese' (*Fandui meiguo wuzhuang riben kongsu dahui*, 反對美國武裝日本控訴大會). While listening to the tragic story of a woman victim of the abuses of imperialist forces, Sanmao bursts into tears, attracting the attention of the public. The child asks to be the next speaker, and once on the stage he begins telling his story with a determined expression (Fig. 3). This strip sets the background for the rest of the serial: the story we will follow is Sanmao's account of his traumatic experience before the Liberation.

From this opening scene, it is possible to observe a transformation in Zhang Leping's drawing style. Although recognizable from his three standing locks, Sanmao's look has decidedly changed. He is well dressed, and he has finally gained some weight. By presenting a polished version of his cartoon hero, Zhang Leping underlined the better life conditions which Sanmao enjoyed in the PRC. However, the little hero's transformation was not limited to his healthier look; but it also involved also the mode of representation. Sanmao has suddenly lost his caricatured features: his body is now well proportioned, and his head doesn't look too big anymore. Also his gestures and movement seem more decisive and appropriate than before. In contrast to earlier strips, where he always broke conventions and readers' expectations generating humoristic situations, here Sanmao behaves exactly as he ought to. He sits decorously, he cries and he participates in the public spectacle of the mass accusation. These changes deprived Sanmao of the comic power that his figure and behavior held even when dealing with dramatic situations. Also the strips did not present the humoristic content typical of pre-1949 strips. For instance, 'Mass Accusation Meeting' does not contain any humoristic features or any second meaning; it only introduces the story in the clearest way possible, following the principles of socialist realism. The rest of *Sanmao Stands Up* – and possibly all the comics Zhang Leping drew after 1949 – maintained the same style, which resembles more the illustrations of *lianhuanhua* than the original *Sanmao* strips.

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<sup>58</sup> Julia C. Strauss ed., *The History of the People's Republic of China (1949-1976)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 47.



Fig. 3: Zhang Leping. 'Mass Accusation Meeting', (*Gongsu dahui* 控訴大會), *Liberation Daily*, 5 May 1951.

Who is Sanmao going to accuse? As suggested by the banner in the room, the subjects of the meeting are Japanese and American military forces. While Sanmao exposes the cruel actions of Japanese soldiers during the War of Resistance, his story focuses mostly on American soldiers' despicable actions in Shanghai before the Liberation. Although the strips describe Sanmao's life before 1949, the bluntly negative portrays of American soldiers should be understood in the context of the ongoing Resist America, Aid Korea Campaign (*Kangmei yuanchao yundong*, 抗美援朝運動) (1950-1953), during which several satirical cartoons criticizing the U.S. were published in the most popular newspapers.<sup>59</sup> The main idea of the Campaign was to emphasize how America engaged in economic and political aggression against China, and to support Chinese intervention in Korea.<sup>60</sup> In order to fulfill the aims of the Resist America, Aid Korea Campaign, Zhang Leping blamed foreign imperialism for Sanmao's suffering. The story starts during the War of Resistance, when the quiet life of Sanmao's family in the countryside is interrupted by the Japanese invasion. The child and his parents hide from the Japanese soldiers,

<sup>59</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 162-165.

<sup>60</sup> Chen Jian, *Mao's China Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 59.

who destroy their village and kill several people, included the child's grandfather. The following strips show the devastation caused by the soldiers in the village, without omitting gruesome details.<sup>61</sup> Finally, Sanmao's father decides to join the resistance, while Sanmao and his mother choose to move to Shanghai, where the child grandmother lives.

The strip 'Going to Grandma' (*Waizumu qu*, 外祖母去) (Fig.4) recalls *The Wandering Life* strip 'Dreaming of an Easy Fortune'<sup>62</sup>, where the little hero decides to move to the city looking for food. Both the strips explain why Sanmao ends up living in the metropolis, yet they differed greatly in content and style. In 'Dreaming of an Easy Fortune', Zhang Leping showed in only three panels Sanmao's expectations and subsequent disillusion, creating a humoristic climax which made the strip much more than a simple transitory scene. Moreover, the artist managed to set in one single scene Shanghai's contemporary socio-political situation. Conversely, 'Going to Grandma' explained in detail how Sanmao decides to move to the city. This strip is very realistic in content and style: for instance, when Sanmao's mother finds the grandmother's letter, the child has to take it to an elderly man able to read the content of the text, showing that both Sanmao and his mother are illiterate.

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<sup>61</sup> Such as murdered bodies covered in blood, or burning corpses hung on trees.

<sup>62</sup> See Chapter 4, Fig.1.



Fig. 4: Zhang Leping. 'Going to Grandma' (Waizumu qu, 外祖母去), *Liberation Daily*, 12 May 1951.

In contrast with *The Wandering Life* – which was set during the Civil War – in *Sanmao Stands up*, the little hero heads to Shanghai during the War of Resistance, when the city was still under the control of the Japanese. This slight chronological shift allowed Zhang Leping to focus on the Japanese occupation instead on the Nationalist government's mismanagement of the city. In this way, Zhang Leping could fulfill the political aim of criticizing Japanese soldiers, showing the evil of foreign occupation in China, thus criticizing foreign imperialism. In 'Mother is hurt' (*Muqin shangshen*, 母親傷身), the child and his mum are stopped by a Japanese soldier, who asks them for a bribe in exchange for access to the city. When the man sees that they carry neither food nor money, he kills Sanmao's mother, leaving the child crying on her corpse. The little hero retrieves the envelope with the address of his grandma, and in the next strip he manages to enter in the city (Fig. 5). The background is described in detail, with a barricade dividing the characters from the city, which we can see in the distance. The expressions of all the characters are skillfully described, especially the emotional reaction of Sanmao, which changes from fear to surprise and then tragic sadness.



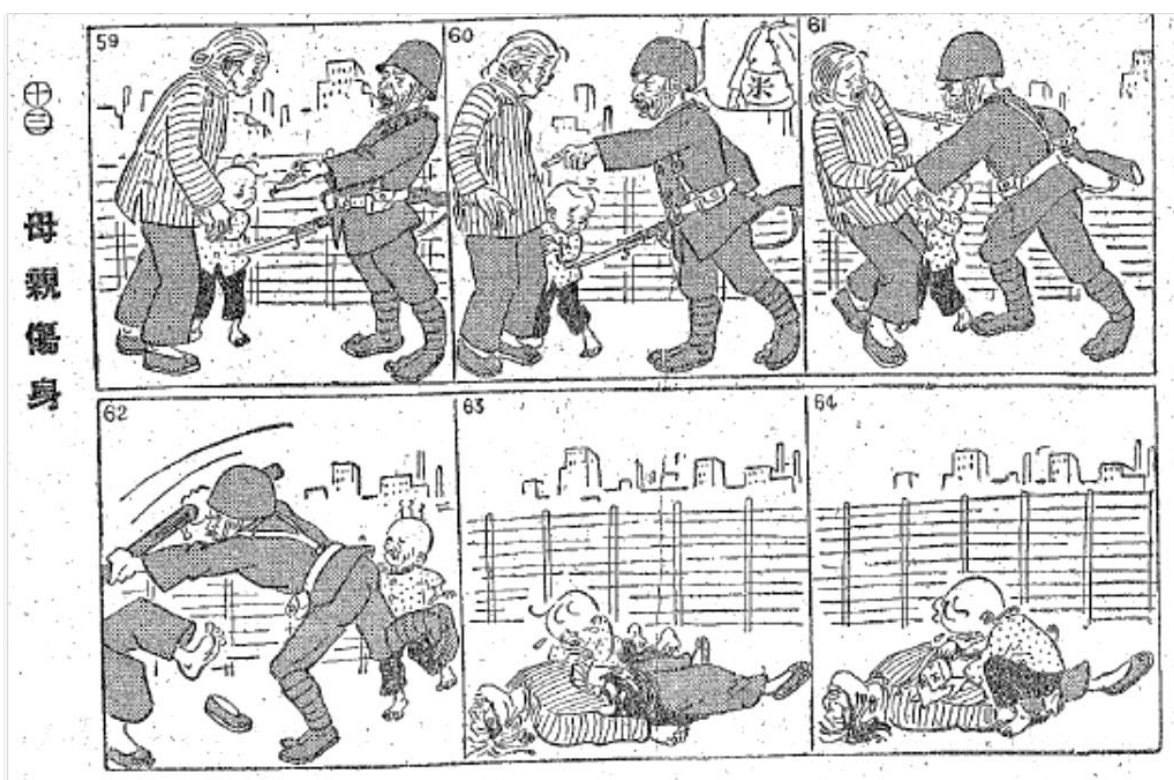


Fig. 5: Zhang Leping. 'Mother is hurt' (*Muqin shangshen*, 母親傷身), *Liberation Daily*, 13 May 1951.

Once in the city, Sanmao manages to find his grandma thanks to the help of several people, mostly workers and members of the proletariat, who generously give to the little child all the information he needs. The behavior of Shanghai citizens differs greatly from the description provided in *The Wandering Life*. Since, as we have seen, Zhang Leping's comics were also criticized for their unflattering representation of the proletariat, in *Sanmao Stands Up* Japanese soldiers alone are blamed for the child's misfortunes, while Chinese citizens are always helpful towards him. The following strips show how Sanmao and his grandma live a modest life using the money they earn sewing clothes. Every now and then they have to put up with the brutality of the Japanese soldiers, but they soon discover that the worst is yet to come. Interestingly, these strips were published at the height of the campaign against counter-revolutionaries, when the party tried to eradicate political enemies, sometime accusing them of collaborating with the Japanese. Therefore, *Sanmao Stands Up* not only supported the war against imperialist forces, but also the suppression of opposition elements.

In 'The Winners' Cruel Procession' (*Cansheng hanglie*, 慘勝行列), Sanmao joins the celebrations for the defeat of the Japanese and the end of the war, as indicated by the first panel of the strip, which shows the date of the defeat of the Japanese with the subtitle 'Japan's Unconditional Surrender' (*Riben wutiaojian touxiang*, 日本無條件投降). However, the child is puzzled by what he sees: not only because he moves a bit too close to the parade a soldier in charge of maintaining order throws him violently to the ground; but also because the American soldiers – whose nationality is clearly shown by the profusion of American flags hanging from their jeeps – look more like a bunch of drunkards than heroic fighters. They ride jeeps while drinking wine from bottles or even high-heel shoes (Fig. 6).<sup>63</sup> Americans substitute the Japanese, and their presence in China is compared to and presented as equal to the Japanese invasion of China during the War of Resistance. The comparison of the actions of the American soldiers to those of the Japanese is designed to communicate a sense of continuity between the Japanese occupation of China and the American presence in the country.

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<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, in the original strips the flag of the Chinese Republic is displayed together with the American ones, while in contemporary publications the GMD's flags disappeared. See for instance Zhang Leping, *Samao jiefang ji* 三毛解放記 [The Diary of Sanmao's Liberation] (Shanghai: Shaonian ertong chubanshe, 2005), 118.

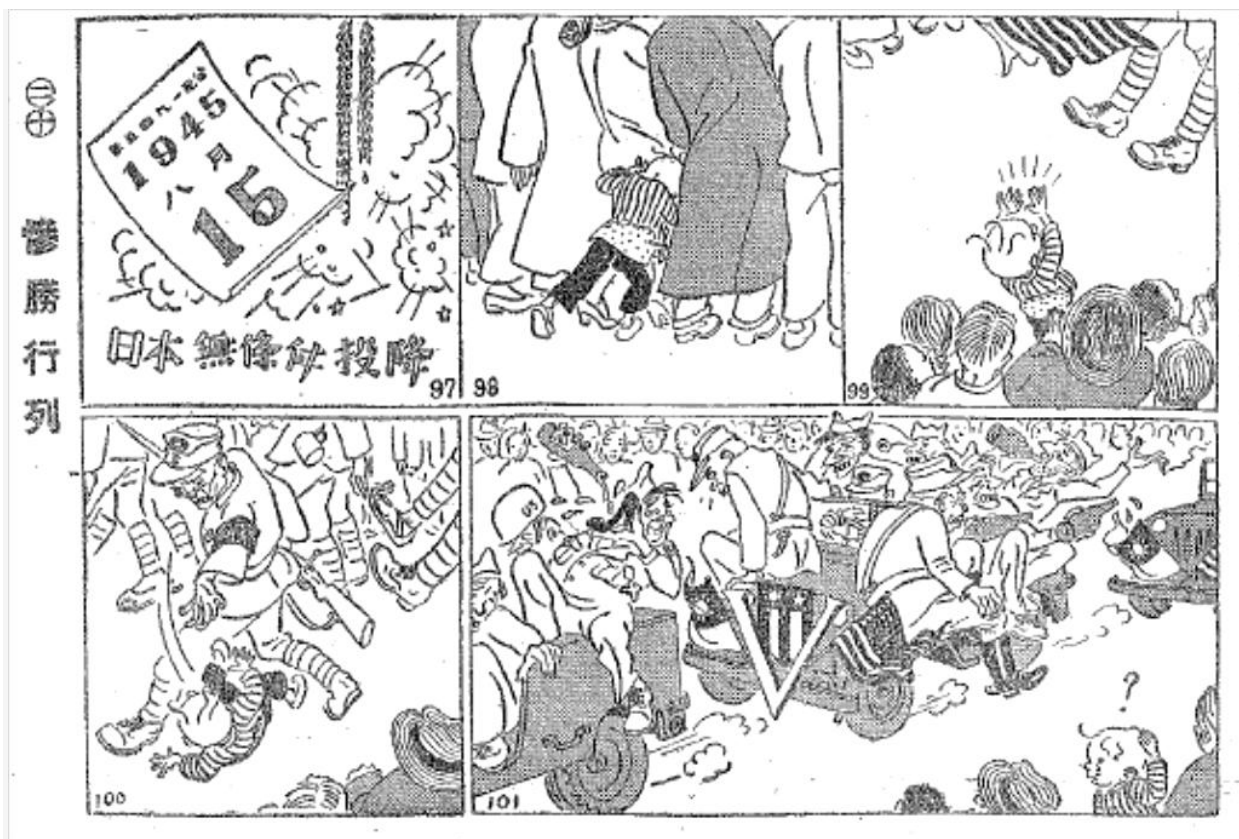


Fig. 6: Zhang Leping. 'The Winners' Cruel Procession' (*Cansheng hanglie*, 惨胜行列), *Liberation Daily*, 20 May 1951.

The American soldiers' recklessness and cruel actions toward Shanghai citizens are constantly compared with the Japanese soldiers' crimes. For instance 'Be shamed into anger' (*Naoxiu chengnu*, 恼羞成怒) and 'Act with utter disregard for human life' (*Caoguan renming*, 草菅人命) tell the gruesome story of the death of Sanmao's grandmother at the hands of American soldiers (Fig. 7 and 8). The little child tries to sell flowers to an American soldier, who is walking down the street with his mistress. The man grasps one flower and walks away without paying; therefore Sanmao follows him asking for money. The soldier throws the child to the ground in front of the eyes of grandma, who attacks the man provoking his rage. He brutally punches the old lady throwing her in the middle of the street, where she is then run over by a jeep driven by another American. The driver does not show any feelings of guilt or sorrow at the old woman's death; he even stops and joyfully invites his friends to jump in the car, ignoring Sanmao's cries over the corpse of his grandma. Not even can a policeman witnessing the scene do anything in order to punish the crime. Zhang Leping managed to illustrate in detail all the expressions and reactions of every single character, even the amused expression of the American soldier's

mistress at the violent scene. To make this scene even more powerful, the artist shows the gruesome detail of the grandmother's fresh blood dripping from the back bumper of the jeep. Clearly, this episode mirrors the murder of Sanmao's mother at the hand of a Japanese soldier shown a few strips previously (Fig. 5). There is a sense of continuity between the death of Sanmao's mother and of his grandmother. Both of them are killed for very futile reasons by foreign soldiers who occupy the country. While all the features of these two strips are quite realistic, they also contain a symbolic connotation: American imperialism is no different from Japanese, and therefore the CCP has the moral obligation to fight the U.S. in Korea.

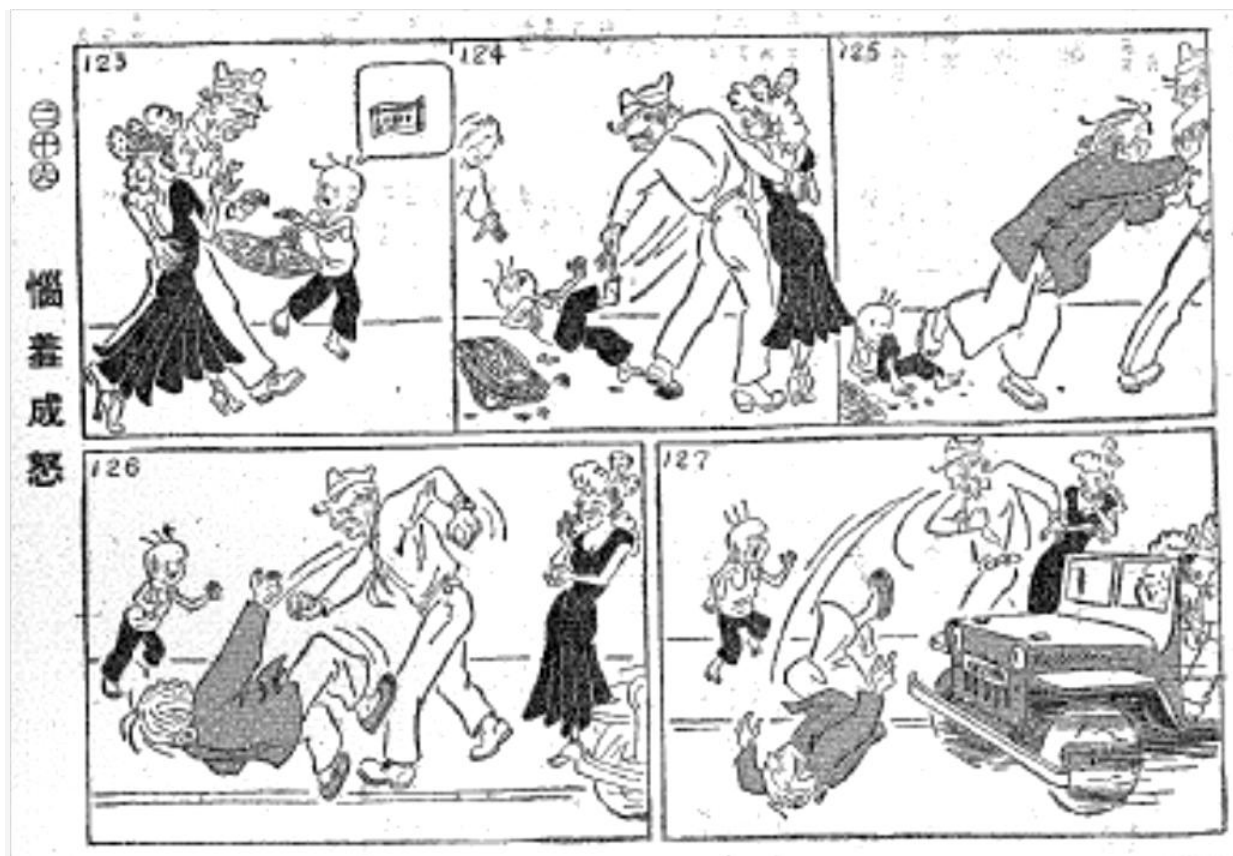


Fig. 7: Zhang Leping. 'Be shamed into anger' (*Naoxiu chengnu*, 恼羞成怒), *Liberation Daily*, 26 May 1951.

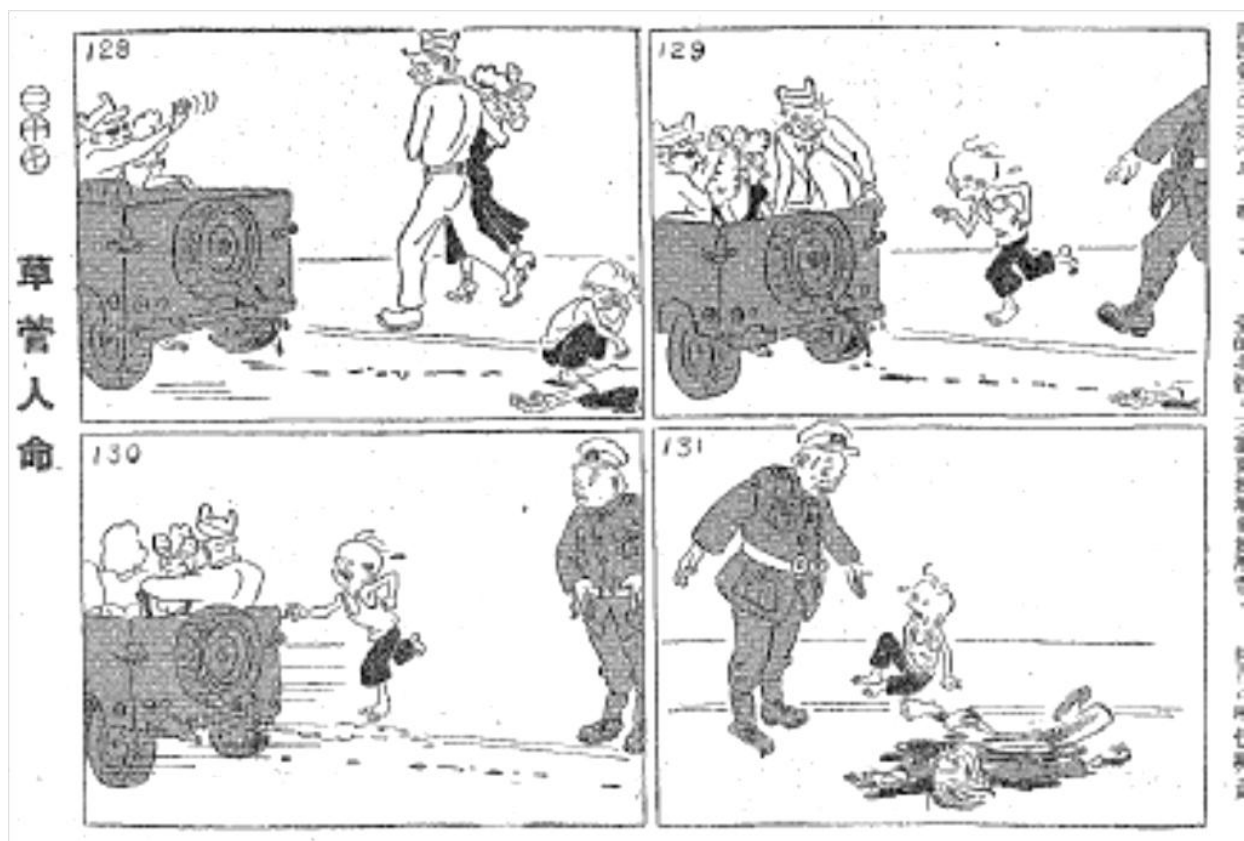


Fig. 8: Zhang Leping. 'Act with utter disregard for human life' (*Caoguan renming*, 草管人命), *Liberation Daily*, 27 May 1951.

*Sanmao Stands Up* was the first extended serial in which Zhang Leping adjusted his work to the CCP's political agenda. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Zhang Leping never displayed great respect for the United States, which he blamed for fostering the Civil War in China instead of helping the population. Even so, American soldiers never directly appeared in *The Wandering Life*, where the behaviour of his fellow citizens and the GMD's mismanagement were the main sources of Sanmao's misfortunes. Nevertheless, since in the early 1950s the CCP recognized the United States as the most dangerous enemy, Chinese cartoonists started to portray Americans' crimes in China, mostly connected with their support for the GMD, their capitalist ideology and imperialism.<sup>64</sup> To compare American imperialism with the Japanese invasion of China was a very powerful accusation towards the US, but also towards the GMD, guilty of collaborating with the American forces.

<sup>64</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 158-166.

In *Sanmao Stands Up*, Zhang Leping not only followed the CCP party's propaganda regulations by portraying Americans negatively and thus supporting China's intervention in Korea, but he also revised the content of his previous work which was considered faulty by party authorities. For instance, in *Sanmao Stands Up*, the little hero is not a vagrant child, but works with his grandmother to sustain himself. Furthermore, the new strips show how the child collaborates with the PLA in order to defeat the Americans.

The CCP appropriation of Sanmao's image thorough the alteration of the character's life before the Liberation is even more visible when we analyze those strips of *Sanmao Stands Up* directly inspired by *The Wandering Life*, such as the strip 'Kaleidoscopic World' published in 1948 and 'A chaotic place' (*Yipian hunluan*, 一片混亂) published in 1951. In the strip of *The Wandering Life*, Zhang Leping presented to his readers a view of one street in Shanghai, showing the chaotic reality of contemporary Chinese society. Thanks to this strip, the artist presented an overview of the confusing reality of the time, underlining how various people carried on with their daily lives, ignoring the problems afflicting those surrounding them. These strips well represented collapse of the institutions, and also the disintegration of any sort of social harmony.<sup>65</sup>

In *Sanmao Stands Up*, Zhang Leping published 'A chaotic place', a strip which maintained the same graphic layout as 'Kaleidoscopic World', with Sanmao standing helpless at the center of the scene while hundreds of other people move around him. Yet, here the situation is different from the earlier illustration. While the astonishing disparities in the economic conditions of Shanghai residents still find place in the scene – for instance in several houses we can see people sipping wine and dancing – the artist focuses on ongoing rebellions, on American soldiers' crimes, and on the authorities' violent acts against the population. The Anti-Hunger protest – already portrayed in the earlier strip – is given much more visibility; furthermore protesters fight fiercely against brutal police officers riding horses. Similarly, in the background we can see people stealing rice while a policeman shoots at them. In the middle of all the chaos, American soldiers either run people over with their jeeps or snatch women from the hands of their partners. In spite of the large number of people visible in the strip, the artist manages to describe very neatly the actions of every single character, creating a lively sense of chaotic movement. The content and

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<sup>65</sup> See Chapter 4, Fig. 24.



message of 'A chaotic place' differ greatly from the strip of *The Wandering Life*. While previously Shanghai citizens seemed unable or even unwilling to rebel, now they are ready to fight against the authorities. While *The Wandering Life* showed how citizens did not care for each other, in the new version Chinese people are organized; they fight against a common enemy represented by the GMD's police and raging American soldiers, leaving no doubt as to their willingness to fight against the system for a new social order (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9: Zhang Leping. 'A chaotic place' (*Yipian hunluan* , 一片混亂), *Liberation Daily*, 2 June 1951.

The idea to modify Sanmao's story by drawing new strips which changed the content and meaning of the little hero's past suited the artistic rules of socialist realism. As we have seen, socialist realism tended to systemize reality according to socialist ideology, creating orderly and unambiguous representations of the society. Socialist realism was also a subordinate cultural project in the construction of an official historical narrative underlying the foundation of the PRC. As pointed out by Richard King 'the culture of states ruled by communist parties was erected on the foundation of a historical narrative of predictable and inevitable progress from a

past characterized by suffering and oppression towards a near future of social harmony and abundance of which the present is a foretaste'.<sup>66</sup> The CCP promoted a teleological narrative about its past, present and future by fostering the production of art works disseminating an authorized version of present and past events. The revision of Sanmao's past can be considered as a one of the ways by which the CCP tried to systematize the past by creating an unambiguous account of the origins of the CCP's victory in China. It comes as no surprise that *Sanmao Stands Up* also included in its plot the arrival of the PLA in Shanghai, and the consequent defeat of the American forces. While in the comic strip version of *The Wandering Life* the author never showed the Communist takeover, in his new drawings the American soldiers' wrongdoings are compared to the exemplary behaviour of the CCP fighters. In 'The Liberators Arrive' (*Lai le jiuxing*, 来了救星), Sanmao meets for the first time a PLA soldier for the first time, who generously helps the child to find the man who stole his clothes (Fig. 10). As pointed out by Yomi Braester, the theme of the good Communist soldier was very popular in post-1949 Chinese visual culture.<sup>67</sup> In the case of *Sanmao Stands Up*, the entrance of the PLA into Shanghai put American wrongdoing to an end. Sanmao's tribulations are also over, as he becomes a citizen of the PRC. The PLA forces are welcomed by the population, and they finally reestablish order in the city. Clearly there was a stronger contrast between positive and negative figures than in Zhang Leping's earlier cartoons. As pointed out by Hung, in communist visual art there was always a very clear distinction between the enemies and the heroes, the good and the bad.<sup>68</sup> While in pre-1949 strips Zhang Leping often represented characters whose actions were dictated by external conditions, in *Sanmao Stands Up* there is no attempt to explain why characters behave in a certain way, they are just described in black and white tones without any shade of grey.

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<sup>66</sup> King, "Cultural Revolution," 543.

<sup>67</sup> Braester, "A Big Dying Vat," 412.

<sup>68</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 158.



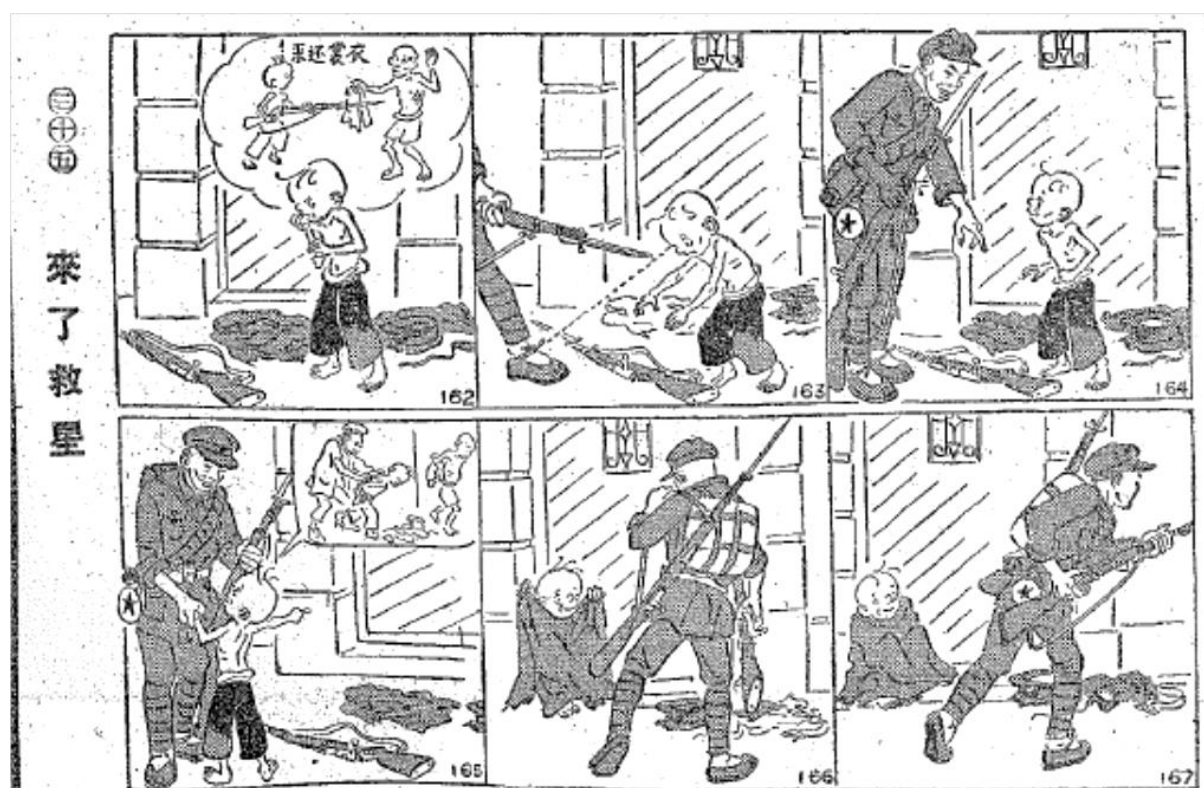


Fig. 10: Zhang Leping. 'The Liberators Arrive', (*Lai le jiuxing*, 來了救星), *Liberation Daily*, 4 June 1951.

Some of the strips of *Sanmao Stands up* are based on the 1949 cinematographic version of *The Wandering Life*. The influence of the movie over Zhang Leping's new story is made clear in the strip 'Celebrating the Liberation' (*Qingzhu jiefang*, 慶祝解放). The film of *The Wandering Life* ended with Sanmao celebrating the arrival of the PLA in Shanghai; similarly in 'Celebrating the Liberation' the little hero joins the military parade led by two soldiers holding up a huge portrait of Mao Zedong. As the last scene of the movie compared the festivities for the Liberation with the Children's Day Parade; so in 'Celebrating the Liberation' the orderly parade of the PLA stands in opposition to the shameful march of the American soldiers described in 'The Winners' Cruel Procession' (Fig. 6). In the strip, Sanmao sits proudly on a tank – which symbolizes the PLA's military power – while the crowd celebrates the winners. In this strip, Sanmao occupies a secondary role as the focus of the artist is on the huge picture of Mao Zedong, the parade and on the cheering crowd. The little hero almost disappears in the picture, as if to show how the historical event taking place is so much bigger and more significant than Sanmao's personal life story (Fig.11).



Fig. 11: Zhang Leping. 'Celebrating the Liberation' (*Qingzhu jiefang*, 慶祝解放), *Liberation Daily*, 6 June 1951.

*Sanmao Stands Up* did not end with the Liberation, but it continued with the description of Sanmao's new life in the PRC as an informer for the party. In the second section of the comic serial, we finally see Sanmao developing into a citizen of New China, as suggested by Xia Yan in the introduction to the 1950 version of *The Wandering Life*. After being fed and dressed by the PLA members, the child infiltrates an organization of counterrevolutionaries. Thanks to his help, the Communist authorities manage to capture a group of traitors. In 'Comprehensive Material Evidence' (*Wuzheng juquan*, 物證俱全), we see a well-dressed and well-fed Sanmao showing the CCP soldiers the place where the counterrevolutionaries store weapons, documents and their blacklists, providing the authorities with the necessary evidence for conviction. In the last panel, Sanmao happily walks with the soldiers escorting the criminals to prison (Fig. 12). The serial continued to describe Sanmao's life as an informer.



Fig. 12:Zhang Leping. 'A Complete Variety of Material Evidences' (*Wuzheng juquan*, 物證俱全), *Liberation Daily*, 17 July 1951.

To summarize, *Sanmao Stands Up* contained several significant features. The criticism the American military forces in this comic serial shows how Zhang Leping adapted his work to the CCP's political agenda. Furthermore, *Sanmao Stands Up* was Zhang Leping's first attempt to review the content of his earlier strips, creating a new story which echoed *The Wandering Life*, fulfilling at the same time the exigencies of the CCP. In this comic the artist did not limit himself to showing the transformation of Sanmao after 1949, but in changing his hero's story before the revolution, he tried to rid Sanmao of his unclear class background, transforming the child from a street urchin into a member of the proletariat. In adjusting Sanmao's story, Zhang Leping changed also the nature of his strips, which from presenting a satirical comment on Chinese society, mutated into a straightforward criticism of identified enemies and a eulogy to the Communist Party.

## APPROPRIATING *THE WANDERING LIFE*: CENSORSHIP AND CORRECTIONS IN THE 1954 EDITION

Zhang Leping's *Sanmao Stands Up* signaled the artist's first attempt to conform his strips to the CCP art policy. Although clearly inspired by story of *The Wandering Life*, Zhang Leping's 1951 comic serial was an original story, which signaled a rupture with his pre-1949 work. However, despite harsh criticism and the publication of new strips, *The Wandering Life* remained available during the 1950s. Xia Yan's proposal to employ Zhang Leping's earlier strips as evidence of China's dark past before the establishment of the PRC found fertile ground among the CCP art workers. Although the negative representation of the past offered by *The Wandering Life* saved the serial from complete censorship, it was not spared adjustments aimed at polishing the story, by bringing it closer to the party's official description of the past. The original content of *The Wandering Life* was altered in the 1954 version published by the East China People's Fine Art Press, which through a few adjustments managed to turn Zhang Leping's criticism of Chinese society into an authorized and unambiguous version of China's past.

Despite criticism, *The Wandering Life* continued circulating throughout the 1950s; yet the serial underwent further changes. In August 1954, the East China People's Fine Art Press (*Huadong renmin meishu chubanshe*, 華東人民美術出版社) reprinted the full collection of *The Wandering Life* (*Sanmao liulang ji xuanji*, 三毛流浪記選集), modifying the content of some strips and eliminating those scenes considered inappropriate. Similarly, in October 1959 the Early Youth and Children Press republished the serial applying even further changes. These alterations, which reflected contemporary political changes, drastically transformed the plot and content of *The Wandering Life*. However, the modifications applied to Zhang Leping's pre-1949 strips were anticipated by the change in style and content of the artist's new serials published in 1951.

The comic book of *The Wandering Life* was republished by East China People's Fine Art Press in 1950 with Xia Yan's preface. Four years later, the same publishing house launched a new version of Zhang Leping's masterpiece which presented substantial changes to the general plot as well as to single strips. These alterations went in three main directions: 1- strips unnecessary for the plot were censored; 2- Sanmao's class background and the description of the members of the proletariat were changed thanks to the substitution or removal of some strips; 3- descriptions of

cruel American soldiers were added. In the following pages I will show how these changes were applied through the manipulation of the original frames of the comic serial.

What kind of strips disappeared from the story? Some of the images censured by the authorities were not central for the understanding of Sanmao's life, while others drastically changed the content of the story. For instance, humorous strips which did not add anything to Sanmao's dramatic life were omitted. This was the case of 'So they are flat' (*Yeshe pingde*, 也是平的), where Sanmao looks with curiosity at the high-heeled shoes of an elegant 'modern girl', thinking that her feet are shaped like her shoes (Fig. 13). Eventually, when the woman falls on the ground losing her shoes, the child is amused by the discovery that her feet are actually flat. This strip recalls of the humorous images of modern girls published during the 1930s, when entertainment prevailed over political and social criticism. This was not the only strip to be deleted for being only a playful sketch, for all the scenes considered as simple jokes without political content disappeared from the 1954 collection.<sup>69</sup> Another possible cause for the removal of this strip from the new edition was the aversion of the party for western style and fashionable clothing. As we will see, in the 1954 edition of *The Wandering Life*, all the strips including characters wearing western style clothes were deleted or modified. Yet, when Zhang Leping employed fashionable clothing in order to indicate a person's social status (generally with negative connotations), western clothes were not censured.

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<sup>69</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 36-43.



Fig. 13: Zhang Leping. 'And yet they are flat' (*Yeshi pingde*, 也是平的), *Dagongbao*, 30 March 1948.

While the censorship of strips similar to 'And yet they are flat' did not mark any significant transformation in the story line, the disappearance of other scenes partially changed the meaning of the story. This is the case in those strips describing Sanmao's experience as a member of a wealthy family. While the cinematographic version of *The Wandering Life* provided the public with the portrayal of a despicable rich family who help Sanmao for selfish reasons, in the original comics Zhang Leping presented a positive description of a wealthy family who host the little hero giving him the opportunity to eat, to go to school and even to enjoy some entertainment. This optimistic portrayal of Sanmao's life as a member of the bourgeois did not fit the CCP ideal of the little hero's background. For this reason, this section of the story was dramatically modified both through the removal of several strips and the alteration of others. For instance, although editors decided to not eliminate this much criticized episode, they still decided to change the class background of Sanmao's step family. In 'Going back home together' (*Yitong huijia*, 一同回家) – the strip where Sanmao meets his step-parents for the first time – the western style suit of the child's step-father and the fashionable *qipao* of his step-mother were changed into more acceptable Sun Yat-sen style uniforms (Fig. 14-15). Sanmao's outfit also changed. In the original strip the child was given traditional children's attire which left his

backside uncovered, while in the new edition his nakedness is covered up. Furthermore, while in the original strip the family lived in a big villa, in the new edition they live in a modest home.<sup>70</sup> These alterations aimed at overcoming one of the major criticism made of *The Wandering Life*: Sanmao's class background was considered confusing, and his desire to live in a wealthy family could signify that he wished to become a member of the capitalist exploiter's class. Changing the class background of Sanmao's host family transforming them from bourgeoisie into working class proletarians, the publishing house solved this thorny problem.

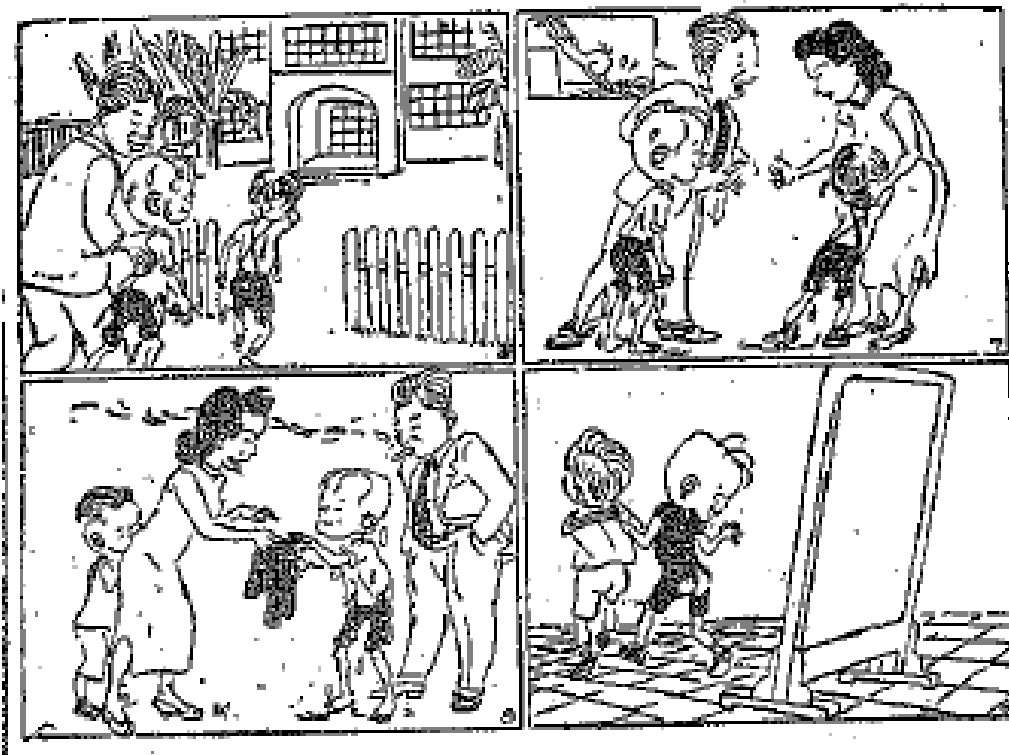


Fig. 14: Zhang Leping. 'Going back home together' *Yitong huijia*, 一同回家). From the original *Dagongbao* serial, 20 May 1948.

<sup>70</sup> Feng Chuying, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 38.

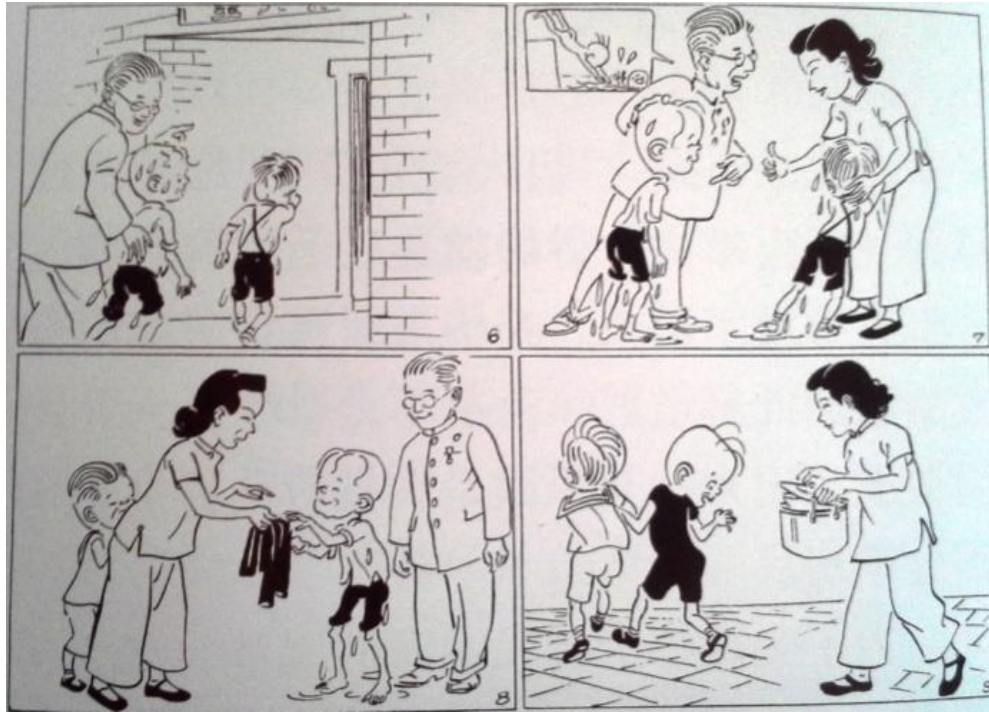


Fig 15: The same strip from the 1954 collection published by East China People's Fine Art Press.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the improvement of the family class-background, editors eliminated almost all the strips describing Sanmao's life with his host family. In particular, all the scenes relating to Sanmao's experience at school were censured. In the original version, the wealthy step-father of the little hero sent him to school together with his son. Since the editors most probably did not want readers to think that poor children could actually receive an education under the GMD government, they decided to erase Sanmao's experience as a student from the new edition. Still, in order to show the importance of being a good student, the strip 'Look who is good' (*Kan shei de hao*, 看誰的好) was published in the 1954 edition; but it was drastically changed. Originally, this strip showed two of Sanmao's classmates mocking the orphan. Irritated by their behavior, the child shows them the very high grade he obtained in the latest test, leaving his two classmates speechless (Fig. 16).

<sup>71</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 38.



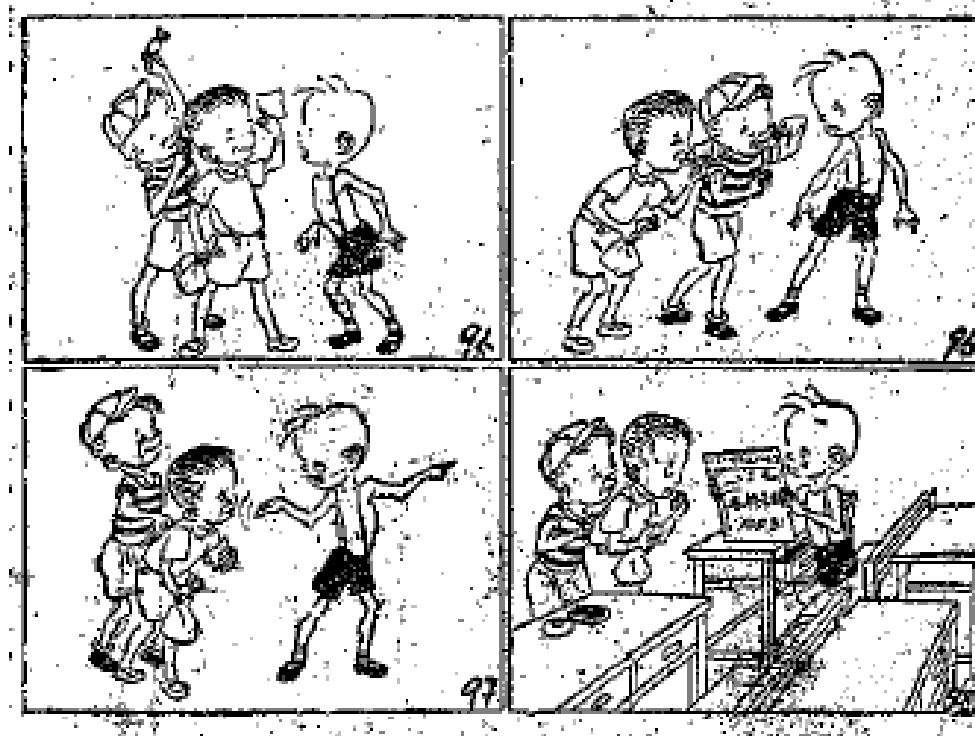


Fig. 16: Zhang Leping. 'Look who is good' (*Kan shei de hao*, 看誰的好), *Dagongbao*, 12 June 1948.

'Look who is good' was actually a strip worth publishing: it praised diligent students, inviting all children to work hard. Nevertheless, since in the new edition of *The Wandering Life* Sanmao did not go to school, this strip could not fit the rest of the story. The solution was to change the narrative, adding a character to the action. In the new strip, the two classmates are mocking Sanmao's step brother, who in this strip is presented as the good student instead of Sanmao. The little hero shows the two children the good results of his friend, whose name, Zheng Zhen, is visible at the top of the paper. In this way, the strip still conveyed a message about the importance of performing well at school, but it did so without showing that Sanmao was able to study. Originally, the orphan's friend was wealthy, but in the new version he comes from the working class, therefore there is no risk of showing a rich child in a positive light for his scholastic results. Interestingly, the change to the strips were made manually, the section of the panel that had to be changed was cut out from the original, and then replaced with the new drawings (Fig. 17).<sup>72</sup> Other strips were eliminated from the 1954 version of *The Wandering Life* since they showed Sanmao's misbehavior. Comic characters like the little hero were supposed to

<sup>72</sup> Feng Chuying, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 43.

be a role-model for child readers, whereas Sanmao and his friends often performed naughty tricks and jokes. For instance, the strips 'Exploited' and 'Making some Superficial Changes' discussed in the previous chapter were censured in order not to encourage children to write on banners and posters on the street.<sup>73</sup>

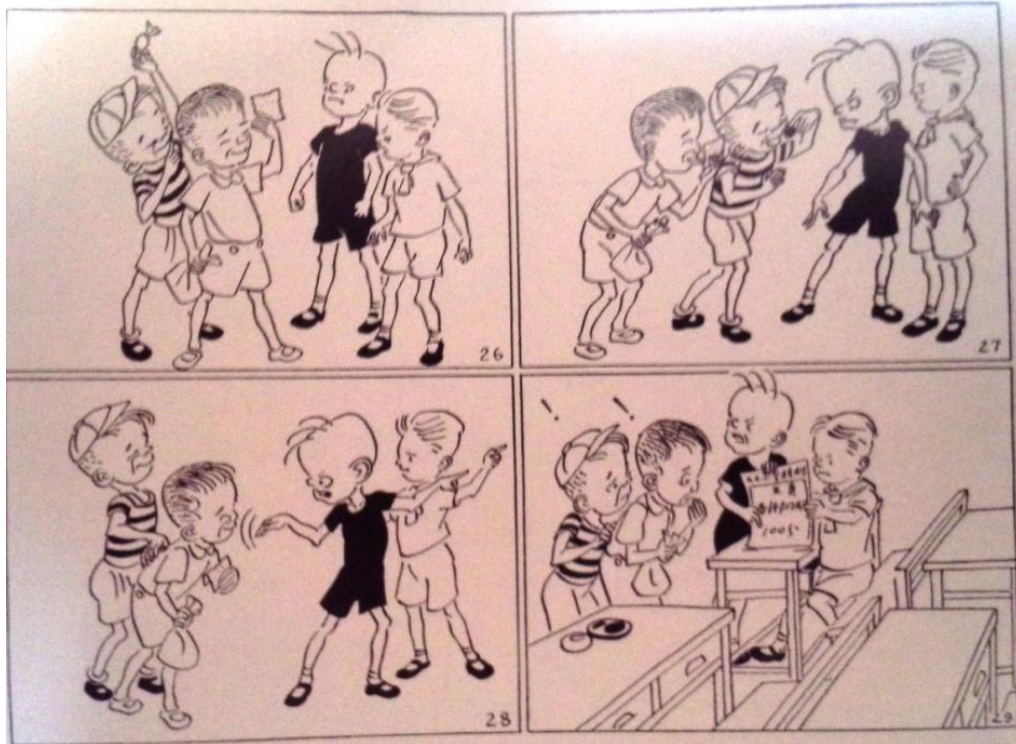


Fig. 17: Zhang Leping. 'Look who is good' (*Kan shei de hao*, 看誰的好) from *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*, East China People's Fine Art Press 1954 edition.<sup>74</sup>

While the attempt to transform Sanmao into a model for child readers to emulate became the central aim in the new strips published in the 1950s, this was not the main issue in the revision of *The Wandering Life*. The little hero's class background and the representation of the Shanghai proletariat were much more important. As we have already seen, the authorities did not like the fact that Sanmao was a wandering child, since often children like him were connected with the illegal activities of gangs and secret societies. Still, the identity of Sanmao was central to the plot of *The Wandering Life*, and it could not be changed. Still, the authorities could require making Sanmao's social background to be made as close as possible to that of a proletarian child. As we

<sup>73</sup> See Chapter 4, Fig 7-8.

<sup>74</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 43.

have seen, the child's connections with the bourgeois family were eradicated from the original story thanks to the elimination of certain strips and the changes to the family's house and dress. A similar stratagem was adopted in 'Dreaming about mother' (*Mengjian Muqin*, 夢見母親), where the little hero meets his mum in a dream. In the original strip, the woman wore a *qipao*, which in the new edition was changed into a more appropriate Sun Yat-sen uniform. In this way, the strip suggested that Sanmao's mother was a member of the working class (Fig. 18 and 19).

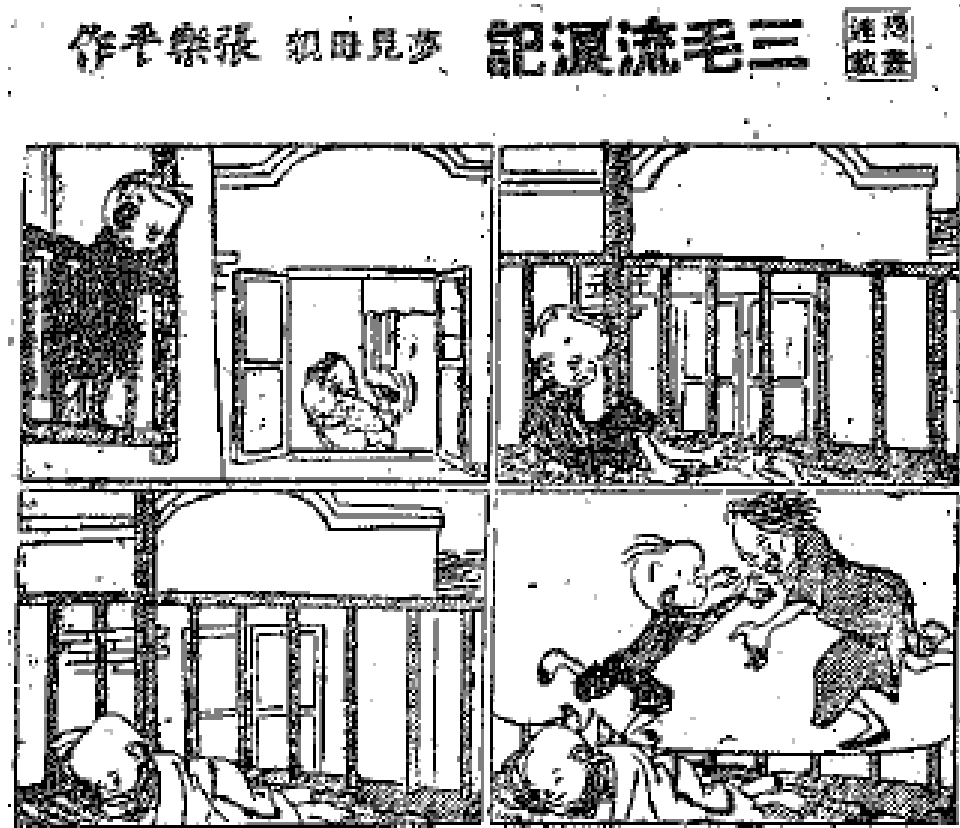


Fig. 18: Zhang Leping. 'Dreaming about mother' (*Mengjian muqin*, 夢見母親). From the original *Dagongbao* serial, 26 April 1948.

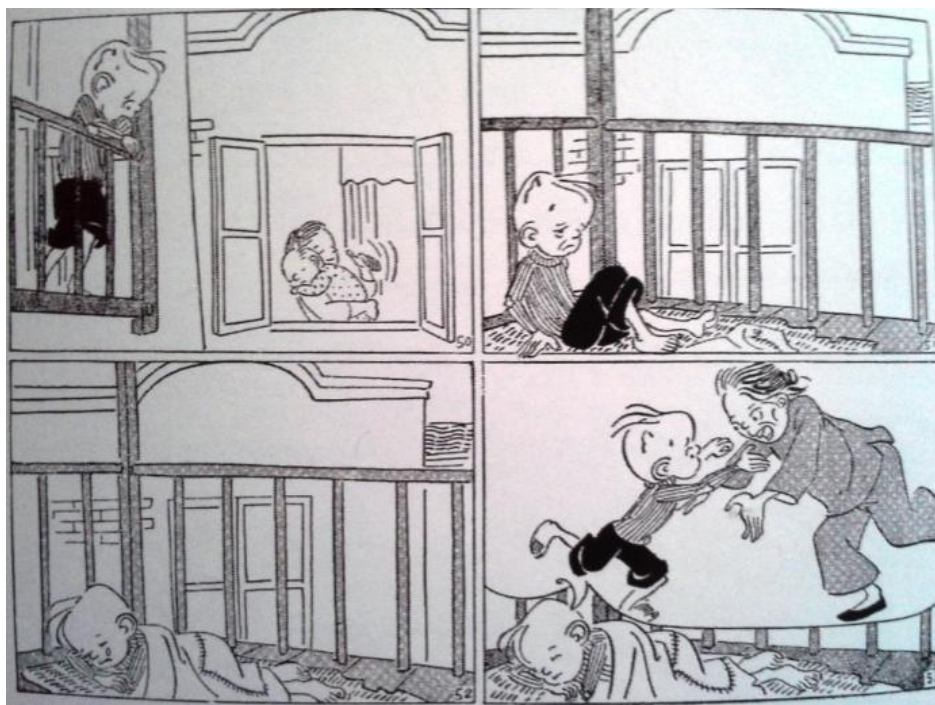


Fig.19: Zhang Leping. from the 1954 collection published by East China People's Fine Art Press.<sup>75</sup>

Another issue connected with social class in *The Wandering Life* was Zhang Leping's representation of violence and carelessness among the members of Shanghai's proletariat and some of Sanmao's activities as member of the underclass. In the East China People's Fine Art Press edition, a couple of strips showing physical violence among poor people were censured. The tendency to delete scene of violent behaviour among those supposed to be the pillars of New China became even more evident in a later edition of Zhang Leping 's comic serial. In this respect, one of the major changes in the East China People's Fine Art Press edition concerned the two strips 'Exerting one's strength with no results' (*Baimai liqi*, 白賣力氣) and 'Furious' (*Qifen jile*, 氣憤極了). In the original strips, Sanmao and his master put on an acrobatic show in the street. Numerous people attend the performance, but when it comes to make a donation, the crowd disperses without leaving any money for the performers. The same scene is repeated in 'Furious', but as announced by the title, in this case Sanmao's master flares up, breaking a big stick in front of the child's astonished eyes (Fig. 20).

<sup>75</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 38.



Fig 20: Zhang Leping, 'Furious' (*Qifen jile* ,氣憤極了), *Dagongbao*, 6 May 1948.

Although the social class of the people attending the show is not clearly defined by Zhang Leping, the authorities thought that these strips could make readers think that there was no cooperation among members of the working class. Furthermore, both the acrobat (and Sanmao) represented the so-called lumpen-proletariat. In order to avoid spreading confusing examples for the readers, authorities decided to change the content of these two scenes. The first one was substituted by 'Exhausting oneself for the profit of somebody else' (*Tiren maili*, 替人賣力), where, in contrast to the original Sanmao and his masters receive plenty of money from their public. However, in the last panel we can see a man dressed in a traditional long gown and wearing a western-style hat threateningly observing the two. In the following 'Making fruitless effort' (*Yichang kongmang*, 一場空忙), Sanmao and his masters are obliged to give all the money they earned to this local ruffian, whose criminal act is supported by a policeman. Also in this case, the child's master vents his anger breaking a stick (Fig. 21-22).



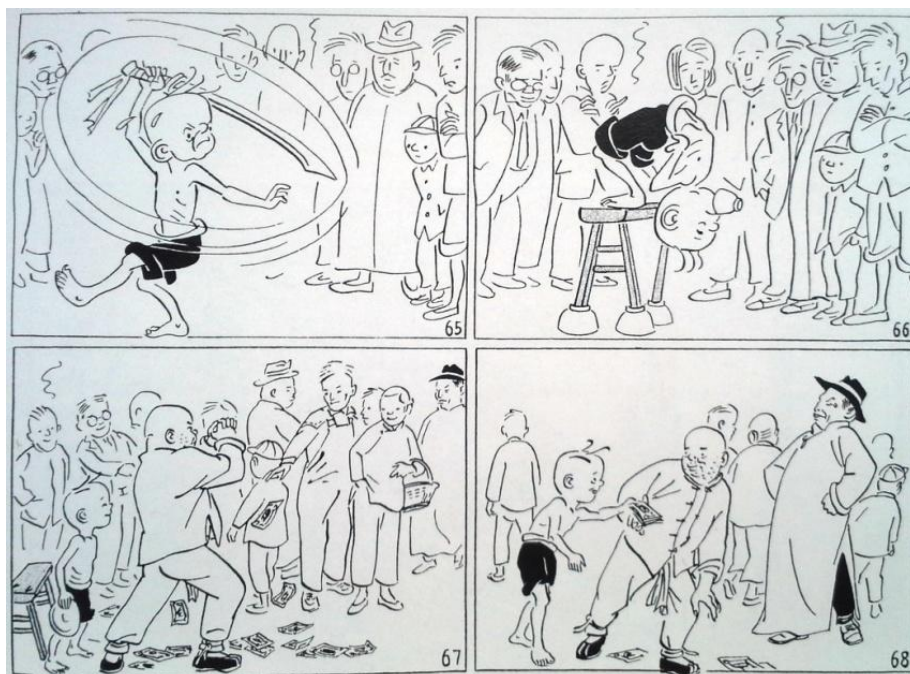


Fig 21:Zhang Leping. 'Exhausting oneself for the profit of somebody else' (*Tiren maili*, 替人賣力), from the 1954 collection published by East China People's Fine Art Press.<sup>76</sup>

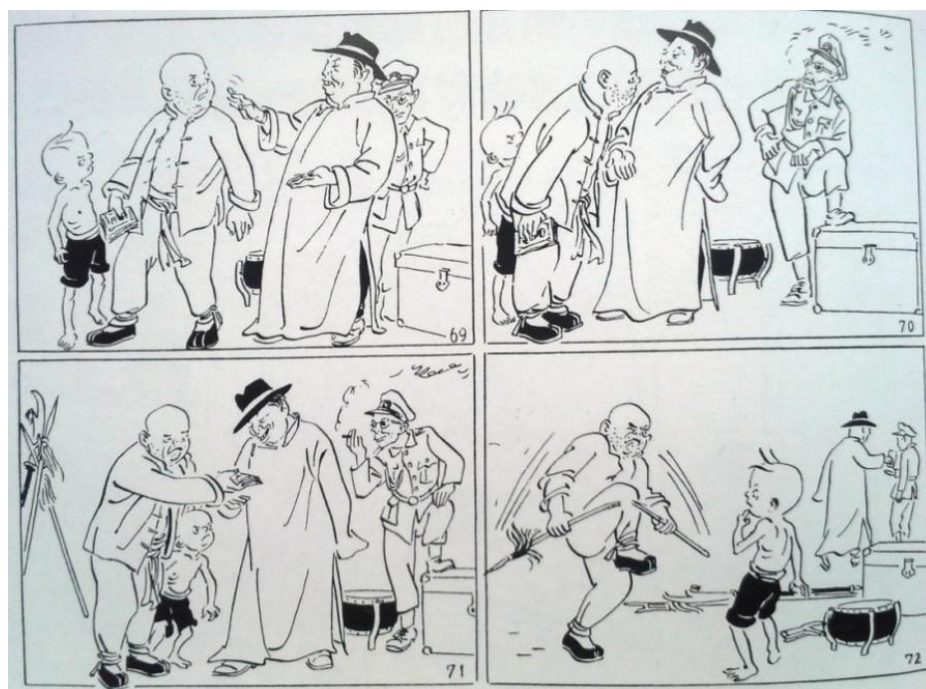


Fig. 22: Zhang Leping. 'Making fruitless effort' (*Yichang kongmang*, 一場空忙), from the 1954 collection published by East China People's Fine Art Press.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 40.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

The two new strips served two aims: firstly, in contrast to the original strips, the members of the lower classes are portrayed in a positive manner, since they decide to financially reward Sanmao and the acrobat for their efforts. Secondly, by showing how the two lose their profits to a local ruffian, these two images indirectly accuse the leaders of local gangs or secret societies of supporting these sorts of underclass activities for profit.<sup>78</sup> While peddling an acrobatic show was not an activity supported by the CCP, in showing how Sanmao is exploited by a powerful ruffian, the strip is transformed into a critique of those exploiting this sort of business often with the support of the GMD authorities (as indicated by the presence of the policeman).

In addition to correcting Zhang Leping's representations of different social classes, the 1954 edition also included American soldiers much more regularly in the serial. In the original version of *The Wandering Life*, Zhang Leping often accused the US forces of fostering the Civil War providing the GMD with weapons instead of helping the starving population. However, scenes of violence between foreign soldiers and Shanghai residents did not appear in the story. Conversely, in the 1954 version, American soldiers became the main culprits of public violence in pre-Liberation Shanghai. For instance, during his wandering, Sanmao spends some time with a rickshaw puller's family, who treat the child like their own son. Unfortunately the little hero is arrested for stealing food, and when he comes back home he discovers that the shelter of the rickshaw puller's family has been demolished by the authorities.<sup>79</sup> This strip was substituted with 'Master Dong gets killed' (*Dongfu beisha*, 東夫被殺), which presents a very different story. After being released by the police, Sanmao manages to come back to the shelter, but he finds the family mourning the loss of the rickshaw puller, beaten to death by an American soldier (Fig.23). Zhang Leping drew inspiration for this strip from a real event: in 1948 an American soldier actually killed an innocent rickshaw puller in Shanghai. For a while, the artist thought of representing this tragedy in his strips, but he decided not to, both because it would have been difficult to publish such a direct anti-American message and because he was not willing to foster hatred among the two nations.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 172-174. See also Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question*, 148-152.

<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 4, Fig. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 36. On the clashes between American and Chinese during the Civil War see Pepper, *The Civil War in China*, 52-58.

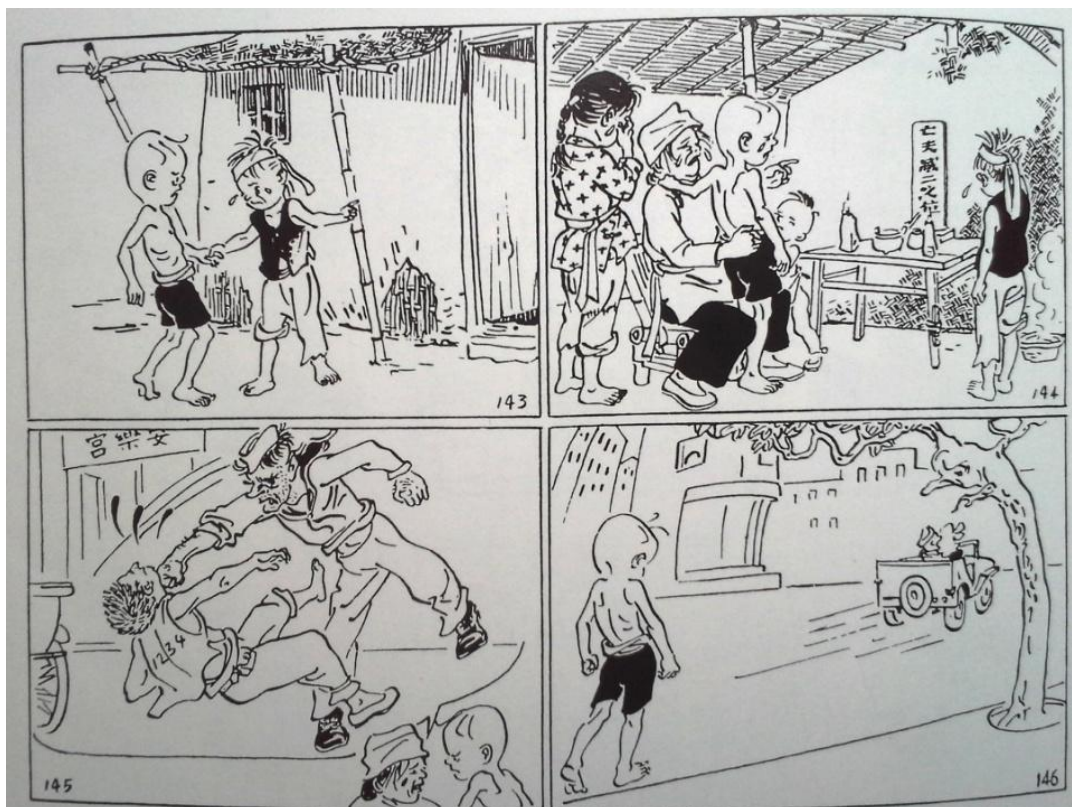


Fig. 23: Zhang Leping. 'Master Dong gets killed' (*Dongfu beisha*, 東夫被殺), from the 1954 collection published by East China People's Fine Art Press.<sup>81</sup>

'Master Dong gets killed' was only one of the strips representing American soldiers' violence. In 'Shanghai is like this!' (*Ruci Shanghai*, 如此上海), Sanmao witnesses the brutality of the policemen, who violently disperse the crowd protesting on the street (Fig. 24). An agent walks in front of the child grasping a truncheon dripping blood in his hands. In the background we can see an American flag waving from the top of a building. The child experiences in person the Americans' brutality when a soldier walking with his mistress deliberately kicks him. This strip presents a strong anti-Americanism, and it is much more straightforward than the original drawings of *The Wandering Life*.<sup>82</sup> These strips are reminiscent of those of *Sanmao Stands Up* in their representation of the American soldiers and their lack of humor.

<sup>81</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 36.

<sup>82</sup> This was not the only strip representing American soldiers' misbehavior. For instance, in another strip added to the serial two American soldiers enjoy watching Sanmao fighting a fire when somebody burns the newspaper he was using as a blanket with a cigarette. See Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 39.



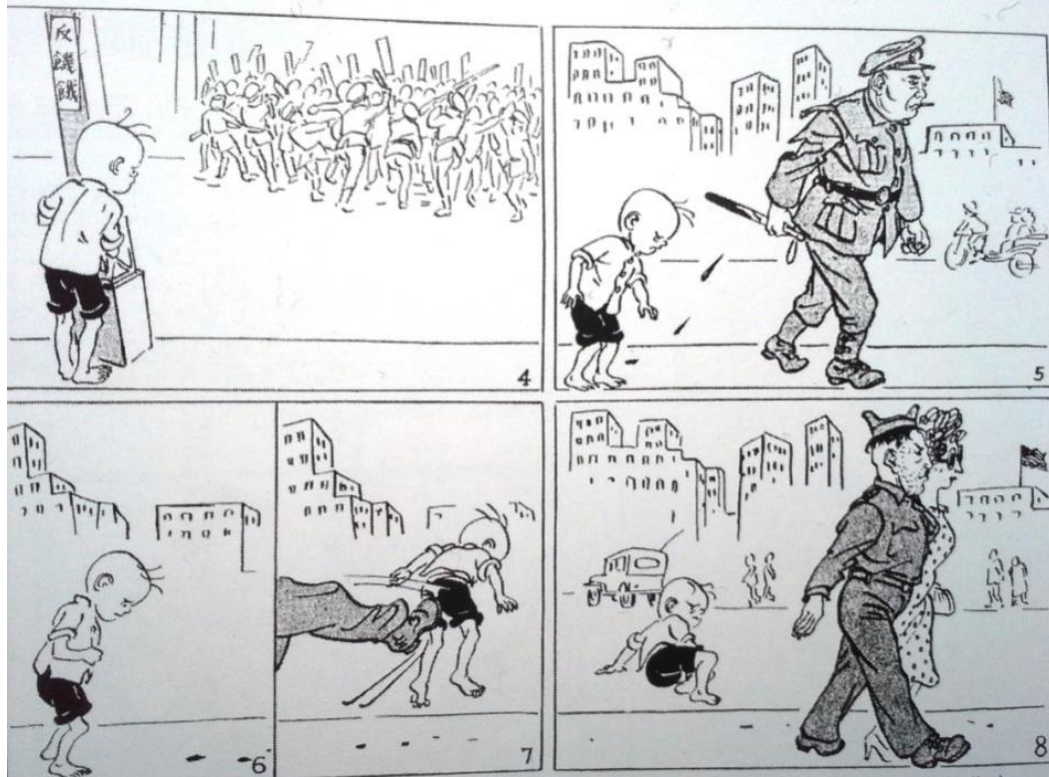


Fig. 24: Zhang Leping. 'Shanghai is like this!' (*Ruci Shanghai*, 如此上海), from the 1954 collection published by East China People's Fine Art Press.<sup>83</sup>

*The Wandering Life* went through further changes in a new edition published in 1959. The criticism made by the CCP cultural authorities changed the original comic serial, which was reviewed and heavily modified in order to fit the party's cultural rules. For this, Zhang Leping even won a prize for the best children's writer.<sup>84</sup> To change his original work must have been a quite challenging task for Zhang Leping, who vented his dissatisfaction during the Hundred Flowers Campaign in the mid 1950s.

### **SANMAO IS NOT GUILTY: ZHANG LEPING' S REACTION TO THE NEW CULTURAL RULES DURING THE HUNDRED FLOWERS CAMPAIGN 1956-1957.**

The first half of the 1950s was a very active time for Zhang Leping. In June 1950, he moved with his family to an apartment in Wuyuan Road 五原路, where he spent the rest of his life.<sup>85</sup> Between 1950 and 1956 he worked for several newspapers and magazines and he published new

<sup>83</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 37.

<sup>84</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 256.

<sup>85</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 49.

*Sanmao* strips. Besides *Sanmao's Denunciation* and *Sanmao Stands Up*, in 1956 Zhang Leping published in *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*, 人民日報) *Sanmao's Diary* (*Sanmao riji*, 三毛日記), a short comic serial in which the little hero taught child readers how to be good students, how to respect hygienic rules and how to behave as ideal communist children.<sup>86</sup> In the same year, Zhang Leping also worked on several propaganda cartoons and *nianhua*; furthermore he published a *lianhuanhua* titled *Child Number Two* (*Erwazi*, 二娃子) in *Wenhui bao*. Although he was leading a modestly comfortable life, during the Hundred Flowers Campaign the artist vented his disappointment with the party regulations and excessive control over Chinese art production. Zhang Leping's writings and cartoon production between 1956 and 1957 and the subsequent reactions of the CCP at the end of the campaign can help us to comprehend the relation of mutual dependency which united the artist and the party, indispensable also for the understanding of the further development of Zhang Leping's career.

The Hundred Flowers Campaign was launched in spring 1956, when Chairman Mao Zedong called for criticism of bureaucratic tendencies, greater artistic freedom, and a lighter control over intellectuals and artists, who were allowed to debate the problems they encountered in their work, and eventually voice their thoughts about party policy.<sup>87</sup> The chairman's initiative to allow the intelligentsia to vent their disappointment and criticism had several motivations, connected with both international and internal political factors. From the international perspective, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, the beginning of the Thaw in the Soviet Union, all shortly followed by the revolution in Hungary (1956) alarmed Mao, who feared similar civil unrest and cultural change might take place in China.<sup>88</sup> He believed, however, that to allow greater freedom could serve as a safety valve for rising tensions among the Chinese population. Internal politics also played a role, since by allowing the masses to criticize rival party authorities, Mao planned to strengthen his own position in the party and overcome the forces of bureaucracy which were in his view stifling the revolution.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Published on *People's Daily* from 19 August 1956 till 27 February 1957. See Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 57.

<sup>87</sup> Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 179-188.

<sup>88</sup> Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 54-62.

<sup>89</sup> Sergey Radchenko, "1956," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Smith, 150-152.

Chinese cartoonists also pointed out that while picture-story books were considered educational and were therefore supported economically and structurally by the CCP, the authorities had always been suspicious of cartoons for their political nature, and the production of satirical cartoons was often undermined. In the years preceding the Hundred Flowers Campaign, the problem of using satire in order to attack cadres had been discussed in the pages of major newspapers, but this kind of criticism did not receive the support of the authorities.<sup>90</sup> In order to vent their dissatisfaction, and to denounce the over-bureaucratization of the system, cartoonists published several cartoons criticizing lazy cadres and party inefficiency.<sup>91</sup> Also Zhang Leping participated in the discussion, and he produced satirical cartoons commenting upon cadres' inefficiency, such as 'Very hard working leaders' (*Xinxin kuku de dangjiaren*, 辛辛苦苦的當家人), which he published in May 1957 together with Zhang Wenyuan 張文元 (1910-1992), a cartoonist member of the Democratic League.<sup>92</sup> As many other sketches produced in those years, this cartoon mocked those cadres who did not perform any activity, but relied instead on the work of a few industrious colleagues.<sup>93</sup>

Although Zhang Leping participated to the debate regarding cartoons, he seemed to be more interested in the destiny of his cartoon hero Sanmao. As we have already seen, the artist's strips could not be easily pigeonholed into a precise artistic category: on the one hand, they shared several features with *lianhuanhua* and they were often marketed as such; on the other hand, the *Sanmao* comic strips originally shared the critical nature of satirical cartoons. Certainly, Zhang Leping's post-Liberation comic serials lost much of their biting content, and they look more similar to picture-story books in content and style. Although the artist was willing to collaborate with the CCP and to adjust his work to the new political situation, during the Hundred Flowers Campaign he had the opportunity to express his disappointment at the treatment the party reserved for his strips and at the transformation of Sanmao, in his already quoted article 'Sanmao is not Guilty' published in *Wenhui bao* on 18 May 1957. While in the first section of the article

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<sup>90</sup> Gan Xianfeng, *Zhongguo manhua shi*, 270-281.

<sup>91</sup> Altehenger, 'A Socialist Satire', 95.

<sup>92</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 55.

<sup>93</sup> Similar cartoon were published on the magazine *Manhua*.

the artist claimed not to understand the criticism made of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*; in the second part Zhang Leping explained what he thought about his new strips:

Later, [after *The Wandering Life* was republished in 1950] I also obtained the support of Liberation Daily, for which I drew Sanmao Stands Up. However, I couldn't shake off 'the impression that the above-mentioned comments made on me: I was overcautious, and my new creation was much different from *The Wandering Life*. The newspaper supported me, but editors also imposed on me some restrictions about the content of the strips. They wanted me to portray all the political movements, from land reform, to fighting the American capitalists, stressing at the same time the importance of the Revolution etc. In this way, Sanmao became a bit mysterious (*shenmi*, 神秘), and not well drawn.<sup>94</sup>

With these words, Zhang Leping pointed out his dissatisfaction with his new strips, which he considered to be overcautious and badly drawn. The artist blames the restrictions imposed by the authorities, and the need to cover several pre-established subjects connected with the contemporary political campaigns. His disappointment with the new regulations about art led him to recall positively his years of work under the GMD:

Before the Liberation, reactionaries slandered me in many ways. But I did not shake, because they opposed truth and justice, while the public supported truth and justice. The public provided me with a reason to be courageous (...). The excessive rules of doctrinarism are not healthy, since they block creative work. In particular, I am a person with a low political conscience; therefore in this area the result of my work is very basic. Over time, I will apply more rules, and I will transform my weaknesses with courage. The nature of cartoons is different from the other kinds of drawings. Cartoons are inspired by a theme, and then constructed in a creative way; this is the secret of their special nature. Cartoonists need to have lived many intense life-experiences. I remember that when I was drawing *The Wandering Life*, I penetrated into every secluded corner of the old society, and I really knew a lot about the world of the vagrant children. When I couldn't draw, I used to go onto the street, and the result was always very good. After the

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<sup>94</sup> Zhang Leping, "Sanmao Hugu!".

Liberation, I had to implement the official rules, and my drawings did not improve. From last year when the party started the Hundred Flowers Campaign, I have got rid of this kind of restrains, so in the last year I have draw quite a lot. I hope that drawing a new '*Sanmao Stands up*' will make the story of Sanmao better and stronger.<sup>95</sup>

While Zhang Leping participated in the general discussion about satirical cartoons, it is clear from his words that the party's interference in the production of his *Sanmao* strips particularly annoyed him. Sanmao had always been Zhang Leping's alter-ego, the fictional character through which the artist explored and commented on the reality he lived in. However, the popularity of his little hero influenced the authorities' interest in molding his strips, causing the artist to lose control over his creation. Certainly, from this article we can see that the artist felt imprisoned by the party's appropriation of Sanmao and by the restrictions applied to the production of new strips. By changing his strips, and especially by employing *The Wandering Life* for political purposes, the authorities distorted Zhang Leping's thoughts, depriving him of any kind of agency over his art production. The freedom of speech granted during the Hundred Flowers Campaign allowed Zhang Leping to raise his concerns about the quality of his work and his wish to reclaim control over his little hero.

Unfortunately, Zhang did not manage to draw a new version of *Sanmao Stands Up* free from strict official rules. A few months after the publication of his article, the Hundred Flowers Movement came to an end, substituted by the Anti-Rightist Movement on 21 July 1957.<sup>96</sup> When Mao understood that the criticism of the intelligentsia was not serving the socialist cause, but on the contrary it was eroding the right of the CCP to rule the country, the Chairman put an end to the Hundred Flowers Movement and labeled more than half a million intellectuals and party officials who dared to speak against the system 'poisonous weeds'.<sup>97</sup> Despite the harsh criticism he had dared to publicly to voice, Zhang Leping escaped punishment.

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<sup>95</sup> Zhang Leping, "Sanmao Hegu!".

<sup>96</sup> Chung Yen-lin, "The Witch-Hunting Vanguard: The Central Secretariat's Roles and the Activities in the Anti-Rightist Campaign," *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 206 (2011): 391-411.

<sup>97</sup> Radchenko, "1956," 150-151.

Several artists who dared to speak up against the party were accused of rightist tendency, and were forced to publish a lengthy statement of self-criticism.<sup>98</sup> Other artists were not so lucky, and they were sent to the countryside for re-education. Also Zhang Wen Yuan, the cartoonist with whom Zhang Leping collaborated in the creation of the satirical cartoon 'Very hard working leaders', was also labeled a 'rightist', and sent to Ningxia Province for re-education.<sup>99</sup> In contrast, despite his public criticism, and his collaboration in the creation of 'Very hard working leaders', Zhang Leping came out unaffected from the Anti-rightist Campaign, even if the party's reaction against many of his friends served as strong deterrent against any new form of resistance.

There are multiple reasons which might have contributed to saving Zhang Leping from being labeled a rightist element. Firstly, he did not have any affiliation with any political party. At the time of the Hundred Flowers Campaign, he was not a member of the CCP, but he did not support any other political force. The Anti-Rightist Campaign was also an occasion for Mao to eliminate possible political opponents. In this context, it was not surprising that Zhang Wen Yuan, a declared supporter of the Democratic Party, was sent for reeducation, while Zhang Leping (guilty of helping Zhang Wen Yuan to produce a satirical cartoon against CCP cadres) could carry on his career as a state artist in Shanghai. Secondly, Zhang Leping's artistic skills were indispensable for the CCP, which was in constant need of experienced artists able to teach their skills to new students. While it was difficult for the authorities to deal with artists and intellectuals active before 1949, their know-how was indispensable for forming a new generation of artists. Thirdly, the popularity of Sanmao was precious for the popularization the CCP vision of history, and also for the education of the new generations in socialism. Sanmao had already been transformed into an icon of the revolution, a martyr whose suffering under the Nationalist Government had been rewarded with a happy life in the PRC. The image of Sanmao was indissolubly connected with his creator Zhang Leping, of whom he was often considered the alter ego.<sup>100</sup>

The behaviour of Zhang Leping during and after the Anti-rightist campaign might also have also played a role in the party's soft treatment of the artist. In the 1960s, in an internal statement about

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<sup>98</sup> Altheenger, "A Socialist Satire," 98.

<sup>99</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 55.

<sup>100</sup> Yang Guo, *Baishi Leping*, 85.

Zhang Leping's work for *Liberation Daily*, the cadres of the newspaper stated that from 1958 the artist had made 'great progress on the political and ideological level. He collaborates with the party, he supports it fiercely, he autonomously developed a critical thought. In his work, he is active, he is enthusiastic, from 1958 till now he had drawn several cartoons, sketches and illustrations up to a total of 355'.<sup>101</sup> In the document, Zhang Leping was praised for his activism during the Anti-Rightist campaign and his support for the Great Leap forward. From this statement, it seems that he consciously decided to collaborate with the party in order to avoid any repercussions from the criticism he voiced during the Hundred Flowers Campaign. By showing the possible consequences of subversive action towards the government, the authorities obtained the artist's complete submission to the party directives. With seven children to support, Zhang Leping could not afford to be left behind by the government. As many others, he sacrificed his artistic vision and freedom of expression in exchange for a better life for his family.<sup>102</sup> Zhang Leping was compelled by circumstances to take the decision to collaborate with the CCP, a decision which also influenced his cartoon hero Sanmao.

## CHILDREN 'S EDUCATION AND THE CCP'S FINAL APPROPRIATION OF SANMAO

After the purges of the Anti-Rightists Campaign, Zhang Leping resumed his work as cartoonist in *Liberation Daily*, a position which ensured decent living conditions during the years of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), which caused severe economic and social turbulence in the country (Fig. 25).<sup>103</sup> While the early 1950s had been signaled by debates and experimentation, after 1957 the government tightened its control over cartoon production and even the milder satirical comment about cadres disappeared from the new images published in newspapers and magazines. After the purges of 1957 and 1958, artists became much more lenient to the party organizations. Unwanted regulations such as *Manhua* were closed down, and cartoonists were deprived of a space in which they could publish their ideas.<sup>104</sup> During the Great Leap Forward, cartoons became educational tools aimed at supporting the party's attempt to speed up economic development and to complete the transformation of China into a socialist country. The two most

<sup>101</sup> Shanghai Municipal Archive: A 73-2-398. "Jiefang Ribao Zhang Leping tongzhi xianjin shiji" 解放日報張樂平同志先進事跡 [The advancement and achievements of *Liberation Daily* Comrade Zhang Leping], May 1960.

<sup>102</sup> King, "Cultural Revolution," 552.

<sup>103</sup> Frank Dikköter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China most Devastating Catastrophe 1958-1962* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

<sup>104</sup> Altehenger, 'A Socialist Satire', 99.

popular subjects for cartoons produced after 1957 were: the future outstanding economical and technical achievements of the country, and the actions of the people who could make this success possible. By following the rules of socialist realism, these images were aimed at educating the population about how to behave in order to collaborate in the future success of socialism in their country. In 1958, Mao Zedong introduced the idea of 'revolutionary romanticism', a new style which combined revolutionary realism with a romantic spirit, in order to support the heroic deeds of the population during the years of the Great Leap Forward.<sup>105</sup>

Also Zhang Leping also participated in the production of this kind of propaganda cartoons, but interestingly his images often had children as main protagonists.<sup>106</sup> These images appeared in *Liberation Daily*, but also in specialized child magazines such as *Children Times* (*Ertong Shidai*, 兒童時代), *New Early Youth Newspaper* (*Xin Shaonian Bao*, 新少年報), *Early Youth Art* (*Shaonian Wenyi*, 少年文藝), and *Early Youth and Children Pictorial* (*Shaonian Ertong Huabao*, 少年兒童畫報).<sup>107</sup> In the same years, Zhang Leping resumed working on new *Sanmao* comic serials in which Sanmao was portrayed as a model supporter of the CCP. Furthermore, Zhang Leping also had the opportunity to work on a short animation movie inspired by *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*, and he experimented with traditional painting techniques drawing several colorful plates and *nianhua* representing children, often as Young Pioneers.<sup>108</sup> The development of Zhang Leping's new cartoons and strips was connected not only with the new regulations on cartoon production specifically, but also with the increasing interest of the government for the production of new children's literature. As we have seen, one of the distinguishing features of Zhang Leping's strips was that they were a combination of political cartoons and stories for children. After 1949, and especially after control over the production of political cartoons tightened in 1957, the strips of Sanmao became more suitable for children's education.

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<sup>105</sup> Yang Lang, "'Socialist Realism' versus 'Revolutionary Realism' plus 'Revolutionary Romanticism'," in *In the Party Spirit: Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, Eastern Germany and China*, Hilary Chung, Michael Falchikov et al. ed., (Amsterdam, Atlanta GA: Rodolpi, 1996), 91-92.

<sup>106</sup> Zhang Qiming 張奇明 ed., *Sanmao zhi fu Zhang Leping* 三毛之父張樂平 [*Sanmao's Father Zhang Leping*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2005), 42-58.

<sup>107</sup> Feng Chunyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 58.

<sup>108</sup> Zhang Qiming ed., *Sanmao zhi fu Zhang Leping* Vol.3, 68.





Fig. 25: Zhang Leping and his family in his studio in Wuyuan Road, Shanghai, 1959.<sup>109</sup>

Children's education was a very significant issue for the CCP. Since to transform adult citizens into class conscious people dedicated to the socialist cause was a complicated process, great importance was attached to creation of educational tools which could mold children into citizens of New China. While during the 1930s and 1940s children represented the possibility for China to become a modern country free from foreign imperialism, after 1949 they came to symbolize the progress of the country towards socialism. As in many other fields, the Soviet Union became the model from which the CCP drew inspiration for the reform of its education system and the production of children's literature. In her study of the concept of childhood in Soviet Russia and the reform of children's education, Lisa A. Kirshenbaum pointed out how kindergartens became increasingly important institutions for the ideological education of children, who were to be raised according to a 'socialist' curriculum able to transform young pupils into dedicated Soviet

<sup>109</sup> From Sanmao official website: <http://www.sanmao.com.cn/father/story/quanjiafu.html>, last access 8 May 2014.

citizens.<sup>110</sup> The curriculum of schools for older children was also reformed several times.<sup>111</sup> Besides schools, in 1922 the Young Pioneers group was founded as a substitute for the 'imperialist' Scout organization. The young members of the Young Pioneer organization – children between the ages of 10 and 15 – were considered model socialist children, and younger students were to follow their example and become Young Pioneers themselves once they reached the right age.<sup>112</sup>

Following the example of the Soviet Union, the CCP also pursued reforms in education. Anita Chan has described the purposes of state education in the PRC and the ways in which they were achieved. While Dewey's theory on education – based on the idea that adult intervention in the child's learning process must be kept to a minimum in order to favor creativity and personal development – had been the main source of inspiration for progressive educators before the 1949, the CCP followed instead the example of the Soviet Union, in which schools had to mould children to be part of socialist society, subordinating their personal will the needs of society.<sup>113</sup> Children were judged on the basis of their political activism, and their success in this field could guarantee their enrolment in the Young Pioneers group.<sup>114</sup> The Young Pioneers – established in China in 1951, and still surviving – were presented as models to students, who were pushed to compete in order to become members of the association themselves.<sup>115</sup> The figure of the 'Young Pioneer' was the principal for role-model for children. Real and fictional martyrs of the Revolution became ubiquitous in children's magazines and books. One of the most famous examples was Lei Feng 雷鋒 (1940-1962), a dedicated soldier of the PLA whose image who was portrayed after his premature death as a hero of the revolution and a model for younger citizens.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Lisa A. Kirshenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (New York and London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), 107-108.

<sup>111</sup> Kelly, *Children's World*, 495-555.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 547-551

<sup>113</sup> Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 12-14.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>115</sup> For more information about the Young Pioneers in contemporary China see T.E. Woronov, "Performing the Nation: China's Children as Little Red Pioneers," *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 80, No. 3 (2007):647-672.

<sup>116</sup> Chan, *Children of Mao*, 63-64.

Children's literature was considered an important element for the instillation of revolutionary values. Between 1949 and 1957, the government consolidated its control over the production and distribution of children's literature. Titles produced between 1949 and 1957 mostly focused on children's daily life, while political indoctrination occupied a secondary position.<sup>117</sup> The situation changed with the Anti-Rightist Campaign, when the government tightened its control over the production of children's literature. New stories produced after 1957 focused on class-struggle and Marxist ideology.<sup>118</sup> *Lianhuanhua*, children's most popular reading material, were considered useful for the purposes of mass education and the popularization of revolutionary culture.<sup>119</sup>

Zhang Leping's work had always shared themes and aims with contemporary revolutionary children's literature, and also after 1949 the artist also howed his interest in working for the production of children's stories. In 1955, during the second meeting of the First China Artists Association Council, Zhang Leping made a speech in which he underlined the importance of children's literature in new China: 'We should pay attention to the aspect of children's art, to children's literature and illustrations. In the past years there were only few people able to perform this job (...). We have to serve the next generations.'<sup>120</sup> The increasing attention of the authorities to the creation of new children's literature and the tightening of control over satirical cartoons influenced Zhang Leping's comic strips, which became less satirical and more educational. This transformation had already started in the first half of the 1950s, but it was after 1957 that Sanmao became one of the exemplary role-models which children were supposed to emulate. Nevertheless, before becoming a model child under the CCP, Zhang Leping had to solve completely the problem of Sanmao's unclear social background before 1949.

Between 1957 and 1962, the artist worked on four main projects having the little hero as main protagonist: in 1958, he work on an animation movie based on *The Wandering Life*, in 1959 he published a new edition of *The Wandering Life* and embarked on a new comic serial entitled *Sanmao Yesterday and Today* (*Sanmao jinxi*, 三毛今昔, 1959), discussed below, while 1962 was the year of publication of *Sanmao Welcomes Liberation*. Interestingly, only *Sanmao Yesterday*

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<sup>117</sup> Farquhar, *Children's Literature*, 257.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>120</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 59.

*and Today* was (partially) related to life in contemporary China, while all the other works were still connected with Sanmao's pre-1949 adventures.

In 1958, Zhang Leping collaborated in the production of a short puppet cartoon film entitled *The Wandering Life of Sanmao* and produced by the Shanghai Fine Art Film Production Company (*Shanghai meishu dianying zhipianchang* 上海美術電影製片廠).<sup>121</sup> The production this movie was the result of the government's investment in the development of the Chinese animation industry. The party's interest in this form of art was based on several factors: firstly, the introduction of technological innovations necessary for the production of animation fitted the Great Leap Forward plan for the rapid development of Chinese technology; secondly, this form of art could attract a public of every age – a characteristic which made animation a useful tool for propaganda.<sup>122</sup> Although several of the animation movies produced in these years contained straightforward propaganda, many of them are still considered outstanding masterpieces, successfully integrating Chinese traditional visual arts with cutting edge technology. While the animation film of *The Wandering Life* was based on Zhang Leping's famous comic, it also contained several scenes based on the strips of *Sanmao Stands Up*. The movie shows how Sanmao tries to make a living in Shanghai, a city portrayed as the epitome of China's problems: capitalism and imperialism.<sup>123</sup> The little hero meets a rickshaw puller, and he makes friends with the man's son. The rest of the film follows the two children's adventures, especially their fights against drunken American soldiers. The content of the movie was not original; yet despite the propagandistic content, this animation was much funnier than the artist's new strips. The children make fun of the American soldiers; they play tricks on them, and finally manage to escape. Certainly, the cartoon is far more light-hearted than the tragic Sanmao post-1949 tragic strips.

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<sup>121</sup> It is possible to watch the animation movie on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE223xLrOKM>. Last accessed, 10 April 2014.

<sup>122</sup> For more information about Chinese animation see Yan Hui 顏慧 and Suo Yabin 索亞斌, *Zhongguo Donghua Dianyingshi* 中國動畫電影史 [A History of China Animation Cinema] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005). The influence of the Soviet Union's interest in animation played a role in the CCP's willingness to invest in this art form. See for instance Laura Pontieri, *Soviet Animation and the Thaw of the 1960s: not only for Children* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2012).

<sup>123</sup> Braester, "A Big Dying Vat," 411-412.

Zhang Leping actively participated in the making of the movie, designing and creating all the puppets with his own hands, as well as part of the set design.<sup>124</sup>

In the same year, the Early Youth and Children's Press published a new edition of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*. This new version maintained the changes applied to the East China People's Fine Art Press edition, but new adjustments were also added. While editors of the 1954 version of the comic were mostly concerned with putting Americans and richer Chinese citizens in a bad light, the Early Youth and Children Press focused on the representations of the proletariat in Shanghai. In his original work, Zhang Leping was sympathetic to the suffering of the lower classes, yet his comics often presented an unflattering description of Shanghai's destitute people, who were often represented taking advantage of each other. This representation of rivalry and violence among members of the same social class was problematic for the communist authorities, since the poor, the exploited and the workers were not supposed to struggle among themselves. By representing these scenes of conflict, *The Wandering Life* stated very clearly that these people lacked class consciousness. In the light of the new tightened regulations of 1957 and the necessity to provide children with models for their education, these representations of unruly members of society could not be accepted, not least because Sanmao still appeared to be one of them. Therefore, the Early Youth and Children's Press modified or censured all the scenes of brutality among poor people.

In 'Losing from the sack' (*Peile koudai* 賠了口袋), Sanmao and the rickshaw puller's son discover that the bag of one of workers transporting rice for storage is losing rice from a hole. Using this opportunity, the children decide to follow the man and collect in their own sack the rice which is pouring out on the street. One of the rice-haulers discovers the trick, and violently beats the child around the head, while also taking away also the rice he had collected (Fig.26). Judging from their clothes and their emaciated bodies, it is quite evident that the haulers do not come from a privileged environment; on the contrary they can be easily recognized as members of the working class. However, instead of showing support and understanding for the two poor children, the haulers react with violence and intolerance to their attempt to make a living. This

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<sup>124</sup> Unfortunately, during the Cultural Revolution a group of Red Guards destroyed the puppets which Zhang Leping conserved in his office.

manifestation of violence was not welcomed after 1949, and the strip was substituted in 1956 with a new one titled 'Stretching monstrous hands' (*Shenlai moshou*, 伸來魔手) where Sanmao's friend is not beaten by a worker, but by a policemen, who also takes the child to prison. The representation of a privileged member of society beating a poor child fits the party's ideal representation of the old society, while violence between poor was not suitable for readers of the new society (Fig. 27).

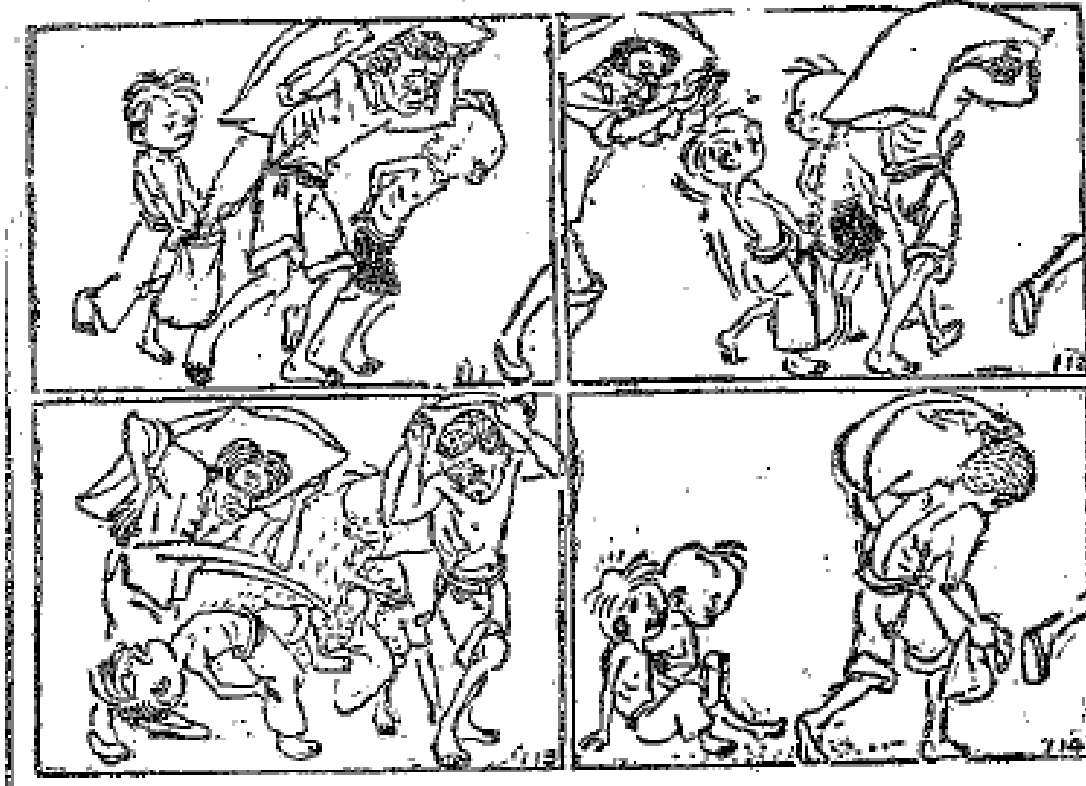


Fig. 26: Zhang Leping. 'Losing from the sack' (*Peile koudai*, 賠了口袋). *Dagongbao*, 13 August 1948

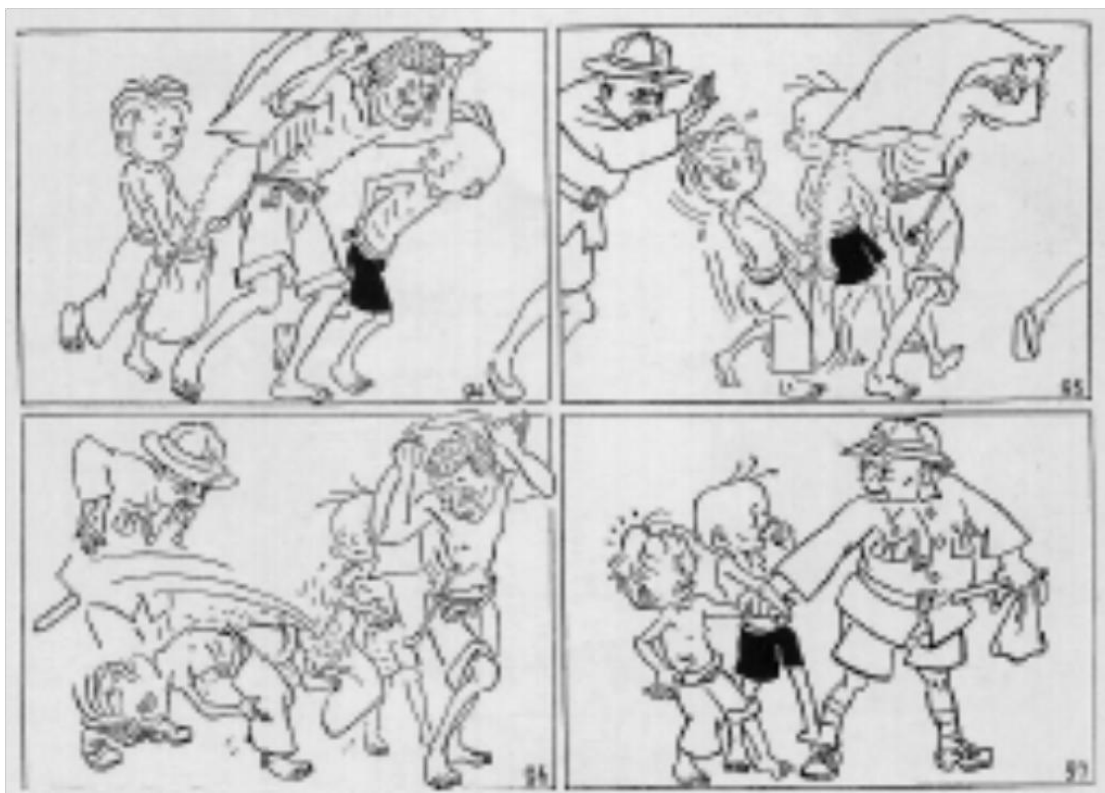


Fig. 27: Zhang Leping. 'Stretching monstrous hands' (*Shenlai moshou*, 伸來魔手), Early Youth and Children's Press, 1959.

Similar improvements were implemented in the strip 'Everybody has a mother' (*Renjie you mu*, 人皆有母), part of *The Wandering Life* section about Sanmao's adventures as a street acrobat (Fig. 28). As we have seen, this section of the story has already gone through a process of adaptation in the East China People's Fine Art Press edition. However in 1958 it was changed further. In the original strip Sanmao is brutally flogged by his acrobat master because he is unable to perform an exercise correctly. Zhang Leping's aim was to denounce the exploitation of children and their suffering for the entrainment of a public who were often unaware of the treatment that these young acrobats received. The violent behavior of Sanmao's master was not acceptable though, since it was performed among members of the same social class. For this reason, in the 1959 edition this scene was substituted with 'Getting hurt while practicing acrobatics' (*Liangong shoushang*, 練功受傷), where Sanmao's master helps the child after he injures himself exercising. In this way, the problem of portraying violence among members of the proletariat was solved (Fig. 29).

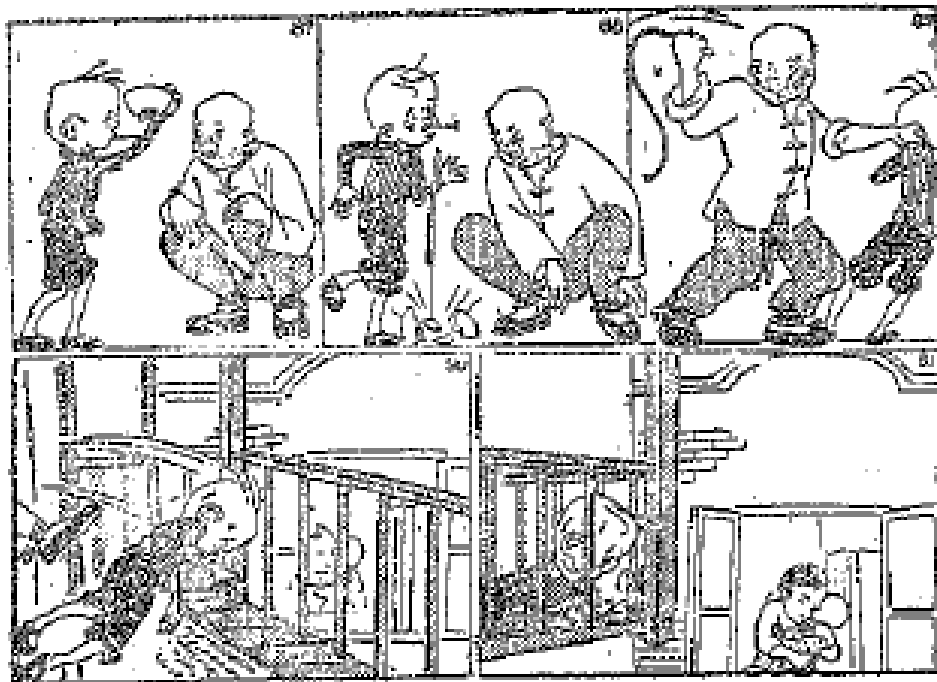


Fig. 28:Zhang Leping. 'Everybody has a mother' (*Renjie you mu*, 人皆有母), *Dagongbao*, 25 April 1948.

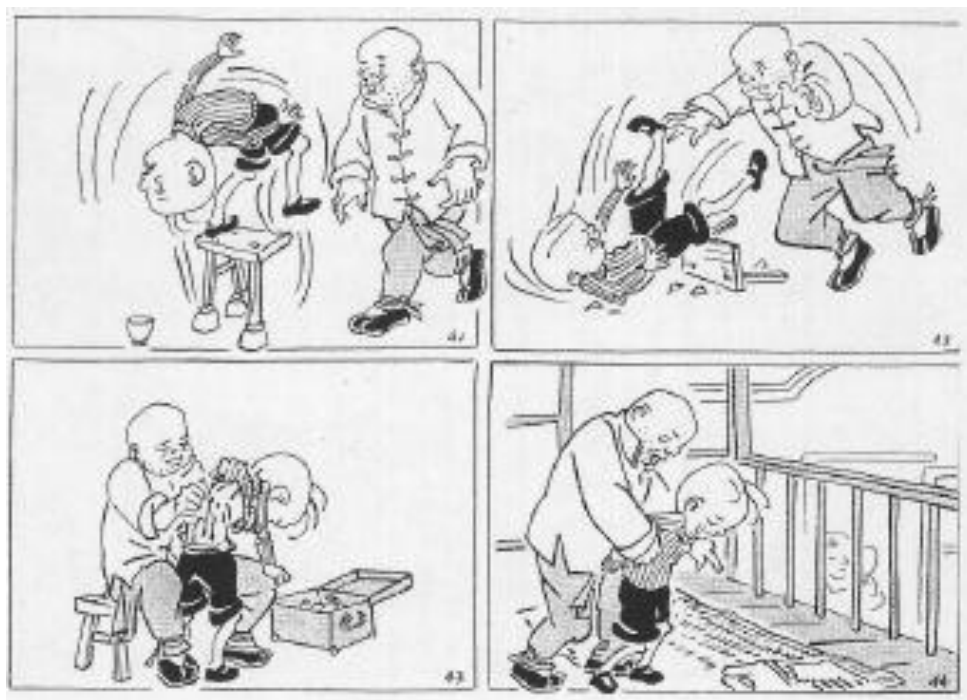


Fig. 29: Zhang Leping. 'Getting hurt while practicing acrobatics' (*Liangong shoushang*, 練功受傷), Early Youth and Children's Press, 1959.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Feng Chuying, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 44



Another original strip which disappeared from the Early Youth and Children Press, was 'Adjusting the price' (*Tiaozheng jiage*, 調整價格), where Sanmao tries to make some money as a peddler polishing shoes. In the earlier strip, the child lost money since he cleaned a client's huge boots, wasting a large amount of shoe-polish. On order not to repeat this mistake, the child decides to ask more money from those clients wearing boots. In 'Adjusting the Price', Sanmao applies his new rule with two soldiers (Fig. 30). In 1959 this scene was considered unsuitable for readers, since it showed Sanmao's capitalist ideas.<sup>126</sup>



Fig. 30: Zhang Leping. 'Adjusting the price' (*Tiaozheng jiage*, 調整價格), *Dagongbao*, 24 June 1948.

Besides working on *The Wandering Life* in order to present to the young public a sanitized version of the lower classes, Zhang Leping also tried to follow the suggestion that dramatist Xia Yan had given him few years before, which was to employ *The Wandering Life* as a reminder of the horrors of life before the establishment of the PRC. For this reason, both the animation movie and the new edition of the serial opened with an introductory text explaining that this story was about Sanmao's life before Liberation, pointing out that in New China the little hero could enjoy

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 46.

a safe and happy life. In this way, Zhang Leping introduced the idea of comparing Sanmao's past misfortunes with his prosperous life under the PRC. The idea was borrowed from Soviet children's literature. As pointed out by Kelly, in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s children's stories constantly reminded readers that they were fortunate compared with their parents' generation, and that pre-revolutionary Russia had been a dreadful place.<sup>127</sup>

In *Sanmao Yesterday and Today*, a new serial published in 1959 in *Liberation Daily*, Zhang Leping employed the same rhetoric by comparing a number of selected strips from *The Wandering Life* with new images describing the Sanmao's new life in the PRC. In the introduction to the new serial published on 30 May 1959, the artist stated the two main aims of his new serial: firstly, he wanted to compare the past and the present, showing how Sanmao's life had improved under the CCP government; secondly, he wanted to make clear that although Sanmao was not a real person, he stood as a metaphor for those real children who lived in the 'old society' and were 'living in the new one.'<sup>128</sup> Zhang selected some of the most dramatic scenes of *The Wandering Life*, placing them side by side with strips representing Sanmao's new happy life. Most of them simply celebrated the PRC; others clearly glorified the Great Leap Forward; still others tried to present the little hero as an exemplary model for child readers. For instance, on the occasion of Children's Day, now The June First International Children's Day and celebrated on 1 June, Zhang Leping pulled out his old strip 'All of them are Children', where Sanmao performs in a show for the enjoyment of richer kids.<sup>129</sup> He placed this strip side by side with a new image entitled 'Sharing together joyful celebrations' (*Gongdu jiajie*, 共度佳節), also illustrating the festivities of Children's Day, but this time in post-1949 Shanghai. As in the previous strip, Sanmao is at the center of the scene, surrounded by other people, while in the background we can see the skyline of Shanghai. However, in this new strip the little hero enjoys with a cheerful crowd the celebration of Children's Day from the shoulder of a man wearing a Sun Yat-sen suit. In the background we can see several PRC flags waving from Shanghai's buildings (Fig. 31). The message is clear: while in the past social inequality was widespread, after the Liberation children can enjoy equal life conditions thanks to the Communist government. Two years later, all the strips of *Sanmao Yesterday and Today* was published as a

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<sup>127</sup> Kelly, *Children's World*, 135.

<sup>128</sup> Zhang Leping's introduction for 'Sanmao Yesterday and Today', *Liberation Daily*, June 1959.

<sup>129</sup> See Chapter 4, Fig. 17.

*lianhuanhua* by the Early Youth and Children Press, the publishing house that in the same year also released also the censored version of *The Wandering Life*.



Fig. 31: Zhang Leping. Upper Strip 'Sharing together the joyful celebrations' (*Gongdu jiajie*, 共度佳節).

Lower Strip: Zhang Leping. 'All of them are children'. *Liberation Daily*, 2 June 1959.

As we have seen, the idea of comparing the past with the present was once again borrowed from the Soviet Union. Actually, in the same year in which *Sanmao Yesterday and Today* was published, Zhang Leping had the opportunity to meet in Shanghai the famous soviet cartoonist Boris Yefimovich Yefimov (1899-2008), who travelled to Shanghai in order to advise Chinese

artists on the function of cartoons under Communism.<sup>130</sup> Zhang Leping was part of the delegation who welcomed the artist, with whom he had time for a personal discussion. The two artists also drew together a cartoon entitled 'Sanmao and Alyosha' (*Sanmao he Ahliaosha*, 三毛和阿廖沙), in which Sanmao dressed as a Young Pioneer exchanged with another child in soviet uniform the red scarf symbol of the Young Pioneer movement (Fig. 32).<sup>131</sup> The title of this cartoon reveals the identity of the second child: he is Alexei Peshkov, the real name of Maxim Gorky. One of Gorky's most acclaimed works was his autobiography, whose first part entitled *Childhood* described his dramatic experiences as an orphan child in czarist Russia.<sup>132</sup> The similarities between Gorky's and Sanmao's lives are evident, they were both orphans who suffered terribly, before being 'liberated', and enjoying a better life under Communism. Moreover, the metaphor was twofold: not only could Sanmao be compared to Alexei; but perhaps also Zhang Leping could be considered to be like Gorky in the establishment of a socialist children's literature in China. Nevertheless, despite all the changes applied to *The Wandering Life* and the new strips produced by Zhang Leping, Sanmao had yet to become a model hero, as required by the new regulations in children's literature. The final transformation took place in the last comic serial the artist published before the Cultural Revolution, entitled *The Days when Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation* (*Sanmao zai yingjie jiefang de rizi li*, 三毛迎接解放的日子裏).

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<sup>130</sup> For a summary of Yefimov's visit to Shanghai in 1959 and his following visit in 1963 see Shanghai Municipal Archive: C37-2-1004-32. "Sulian manhua" 苏联漫画 [Soviet cartoons], 3 March 1964. Although by 1959 relations between the Soviet Union and the PRC were compromised, Yefimov was invited in order to give suggestions to Chinese cartoonists. He met the editors of *Manhua*, and according to the document he believed that the magazine was better organized and funnier than the soviet magazine *Crocodile*, on which *Manhua* was based. According to the document, Yefimov claimed that while *Crocodile* made people to feel 'fear' because of its biting satirical content, *Manhua* was less critical, and thus funnier. According to Altehenger, Chinese cartoonists believed that soviet cartoonist enjoyed more freedom than Chinese cartoonists, and from Yefimov's words it seems this was true. However, the soviet cartoonist did not speak against CCP view on satire, but praised Chinese cartoonists for not being too critical towards the Party.

<sup>131</sup> On Young Pioneers see Kelly, *Children's World*, 547-555.

<sup>132</sup> Maxim Gorky, *Childhood: An English Translation* (Blue Ridge Summit: Ivan R. Dee, 2010).



Fig. 32: Zhang Leping and Boris Yefimov. 'Sanmao and Aliosha' (*Sanmao he Ahliaosha*, 三毛和阿廖沙), February 1959.

While Zhang Leping continued drawing political cartoons and propaganda posters, his experience in drawing children and the impossibility of publishing biting satirical cartoons encouraged the artist to focus more on children's education. A formal document produced by the cadres of *Liberation Daily* in May 1960 confirmed that the artist's political development reflected the importance of his work in the field of contemporary children's literature. This internal document of *Liberation Daily* underlined the importance of Zhang Leping's art for children's education by highlighting the ideological improvements in the artist's strips.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>133</sup>Shanghai Municipal Archive: A 73-2-398. "Jiefang Ribao Zhang Leping tongzhi xianjin shiji" 解放日報張樂平同志先進事跡 [The advancement and achievements of *Liberation Daily* Comrade Zhang Leping], May 1960.

It was not by chance that a year later, in December 1961, on occasion of the Second Chinese People's Political Consultative Meeting which took place in Shanghai, Zhang Leping was asked to give a speech not about visual arts, but about children's education.<sup>134</sup> The artist started his talk by announcing that he was not 'a specialist in children's education' and that sometimes it was very difficult for him to take care of his seven children. His speech was mainly based on his own experience as a father: for instance, he described how despite his attempt to disguise the truth, his children soon understood that he could not solve elementary mathematical problems. On another occasion, when during a dinner he asked one of his children to refill his bowl of rice, his son copied his behavior finishing his food in record time, then asking to his younger brother to fill his and their father's bowls. On the basis of these two examples, Zhang Leping explained how school and family played different roles in children's lives; both were necessary for a successful education. This speech is interesting for two reasons: firstly, it showed how in the early 1960s Zhang Leping's works and opinions in the field of children's literature were highly valued; at the same time, the artist's descriptions of his children's naughty behaviour proved that although he was not free to draw what he wanted, he had lost neither his sense of humour nor his talent for describing childhood. As in the texts analyzed previously, also in this case Zhang Leping employed neither Marxist terminology nor technical vocabulary, but explained his ideas about children's education through practical examples.

Zhang Leping's shift towards education also accelerated the transformation of Sanmao into a model revolutionary child. The most substantial change in Sanmao's story and personality took place in the 1962 comic serial *The Days when Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation*, which started off in *Liberation Daily* on 1 June 1962 on the occasion of Children's Day.<sup>135</sup> Zhang Leping's introduction explained both the content of his new work and the reasons for its production. Firstly, the artist pointed out the shortcomings of his earlier strips. *The Wandering Life* and *Sanmao's Denunciation* showed 'the darkness of the old society', but they failed to show how before the Liberation Shanghai citizens 'surged like a tidal wave, and they fought like wild beasts

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<sup>134</sup> Shanghai Municipal Archive: L1-1-205-62 "Zhang Leping zai Shanghai shi zhengxie di er jie di san ci quan tihui shang de fayangao" 張樂平在上海市政協第二屆第三次全體會議上的發言稿), [The Manuscript of Zhang Leping's speech at the third meeting of the Second Chinese People's Political Consultative Plenary Meeting in Shanghai], 29 December 1961.

<sup>135</sup> This serial was later renamed *Sanmao Welcomes the Revolution* (*Sanmao ying Jiefang*, 三毛迎解放)

in support of the CCP's victory.<sup>136</sup> He also criticized his newer strips, *Sanmao's Diary* and *Sanmao Yesterday and Today*, which described how his little hero 'receives care, and he finally has a sweet life' and he looks 'exactly like a child of our new society'. These strips fulfilled the need to compare the hard times the Chinese people endured under the GMD and the great improvement in the PRC. However, they were criticized since the changes in Sanmao's life were too abrupt and did not show any connection between his life before and after the Liberation. *The Days in which Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation* was conceived in order to better explain these changes. Once again, the serial takes place in Shanghai during the Civil War, when the little hero lives wandering on the street. But this time the events follow a different pattern:

Recently I discovered that at the dawn of the Revolution several underground activities took place in Shanghai, and many of those participating were poor kids like Sanmao. Under the guidance of the underground CCP, they performed several outstanding gestures. This story made me think a lot: perhaps by representing the heroic deeds of children like Sanmao who joined the underground CCP could make readers trust them and understand their suffering in the old society?(...) I believe that not to know about these events would be nonsense for contemporary children who want to understand life in the old society and their people's fight.(...) I am very happy that this story starts on the occasion of the International Children Day, because this is my personal present to our children.<sup>137</sup>

The introduction was followed by the opening strips of the serial, titled 'The Roar of the Huangpu River' (*Huangpu nuhou*, 黄浦怒吼), where we see Sanmao sleeping in a poor shelter on the docks of the river. In his dream, indicated by a speech balloons, we can see the 'tidal wave' Zhang Leping refers to in his introduction. The child dreams of a huge wave crashing on the docks but when he wakes up he sees that his dream was inspired by a group of people protesting against hunger and persecution, as stated by the banner 'Against Hunger, Against Persecution' carried by one of the protesters (*Fan ji'e fan pohai*, 反饥饿反迫害) (Fig.33). Scenes

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<sup>136</sup> Zhang Leping, "Sanmao zai yingjie jiefang de rizi li" 三毛迎接解放的日子裏 [Preface for *The Days in which Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation*], *Liberation Daily*, 1 June 1962.

<sup>137</sup> Zhang Leping, "Sanmao zai yingjie jiefang de rizi li," [The Days when Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation], *Liberation Daily*, 1 June 1962.



portraying Shanghai's citizens protesting against hunger had already been introduced in *The Wandering Life*, but this strip is quite different. First of all, in the previous comic serial the protesters are always violently interrupted by the authorities, while in this case they are unstoppable like a 'tidal wave'. Secondly, the slogan 'Against Hunger, Against War', is here transformed into 'Against Persecution', focusing the attention of the reader on the GMD's suppression of political enemies. 'The Roar of the Huangpu River' introduces the tone of the story: differently from what was told in the previous comics, these strips describe a perfected version of the past where class-conscious Shanghai residents successfully fight against the authorities, in a perfect socialist realist fashion.



Fig. 33: Zhang Leping. 'The Roar of the Huang Pu River' (*Huangpu nuhou*, 黃浦怒吼), *Liberation Daily*, 1 June 1962.

The portrayal of a class-conscious and politically motivated working class was not the only new element in Zhang Leping's new strips, Sanmao's behaviour also change. In 'Stirring Popular Feelings' (*Jidong renxin*, 激動人心), Sanmao follows the crowd of protesters, and finds the organizer of the rally, who is advocating social equality among people, as we can see from the



cartoon hanging on the wall portraying a rich man sitting on an emaciated individual. Inspired by the man's words, Sanmao jumps up full of energy ready to join the protest (Fig. 34).



Fig. 34: Zhang Leping. 'Stirring Popular Feelings' (*Jidong renxin*, 激動人心), *Liberation Daily*, 2 June 1962.

The story develops showing Sanmao autonomously calling rallies. For instance, in 'Full of Righteous Indignation' (*Manqiang Yifen*, 滿腔義憤), the child summons other street urchins, and they together stage a march against hunger and persecution. Furthermore, once he falls ill, he is saved by the head of the protesters, the man wearing glasses whom we saw in the previous strips. Sanmao goes to live with him and his family, and he discovers that the man is a member of the underground CCP. The child helps the group distributing pamphlets and spying on the authorities until the entrance of the PLA into Shanghai (Fig. 35).



Fig. 35: Zhang Leping. 'Full of Righteous Indignation' (*Manqiang yifen*, 满腔义愤), *Liberation Daily*, 3 June 1962.

There are four interesting features of *The Days when Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation*: firstly, this comic cleared Sanmao once for all from the accusations of being a beggar before 1949, showing the child's interest and actual participation in the CCP victory. Secondly, the little hero's involvement with the underground CCP can be also read as definitive appropriation of Sanmao's life story by the party. Although during the 1950s Zhang Leping's strips went through a full remake, they were consistent about the fact that the little hero became a CCP supporter only after the Liberation. With *The Days when Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation*, Zhang Leping transformed Sanmao's life in a teleological story: the child was already loyal to the Communists before the Liberation – after which he could finally enjoy the results of his victory. Thirdly, the story focuses on the actions of Sanmao and his young friends. Children are presented as real revolutionaries, busy distributing pamphlets, spying, and helping the adult party members as much as they can. In this way, the story of Sanmao followed all the rules of ideologically correct children's literature: on one side demonstrating that by supporting the revolution, Sanmao and his friends had become models for their young readers; on the other showing to child readers how the victory of the CCP was based on the participation of the entire population in the party's project of freeing China from the imperialist forces and from the inequality rampant in 'the old

society'. Finally, another important feature is the CCP's adoption of the little hero. Sanmao was an orphan, always looking for a foster family able to provide him with love and shelter. In *The Days in which Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation*, a party member welcomes the little hero in his family, making the child a revolutionary, a member of the CCP's family. Like Lei Feng – another orphan to become popular in China in 1963 – Sanmao also substituted his natal family with the Chinese nation of workers and peasants putting his complete trust in the party.

It is difficult to understand how children reacted to the new strips of Sanmao. Certainly, by 1962 when *The Days when Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation* was published, those child readers who in the late 1940s sent letters to *Dagongbao* asking for information about Sanmao were not children anymore. In the 1950s, a new generation of young Chinese grew up reading the censored versions of *The Wandering Life* and the new adventures of model-child Sanmao. Most probably, they believed in the teleological version of Sanmao's story approved by the authorities, according to which the little hero – well as his creator Zhang Leping – was a supporter of the CCP from the very beginning. Sanmao became one among many heroes of the revolution who appeared in contemporary children's stories. Often portrayed as a Young Pioneer, the little hero could still be appealing to children who grew up dreaming of becoming themselves members of the Pioneer Group. Certainly the new Sanmao lacked those characteristics, which made him likeable when he first appeared: his naughtiness, innocence and a disposition for rebellious action. More often Sanmao appeared as a well-dressed young pioneer serving his country, as in the case of the *nianhua* which Zhang Leping created on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the PRC, in which we see the little hero wearing his Young Pioneer red scarf flying in a basket carried by balloons which compose a huge peony, the flower symbol of China. Sanmao throws flowers to the people beneath him walking with red flags in their hands. The ornamental column which stands in front of him suggests that the celebrations are taking place in Tian'anmen square (Fig. 36). The little hero is still likeable, in all the strips he still appears as a cute child, charming and unimposing. Sanmao's makeover from a naughty child into a model child mirrored Zhang Leping's transformation from a critic of society into a state artist. Both Zhang Leping and his little hero Sanmao had become part of the perfected vision of history of the CCP.



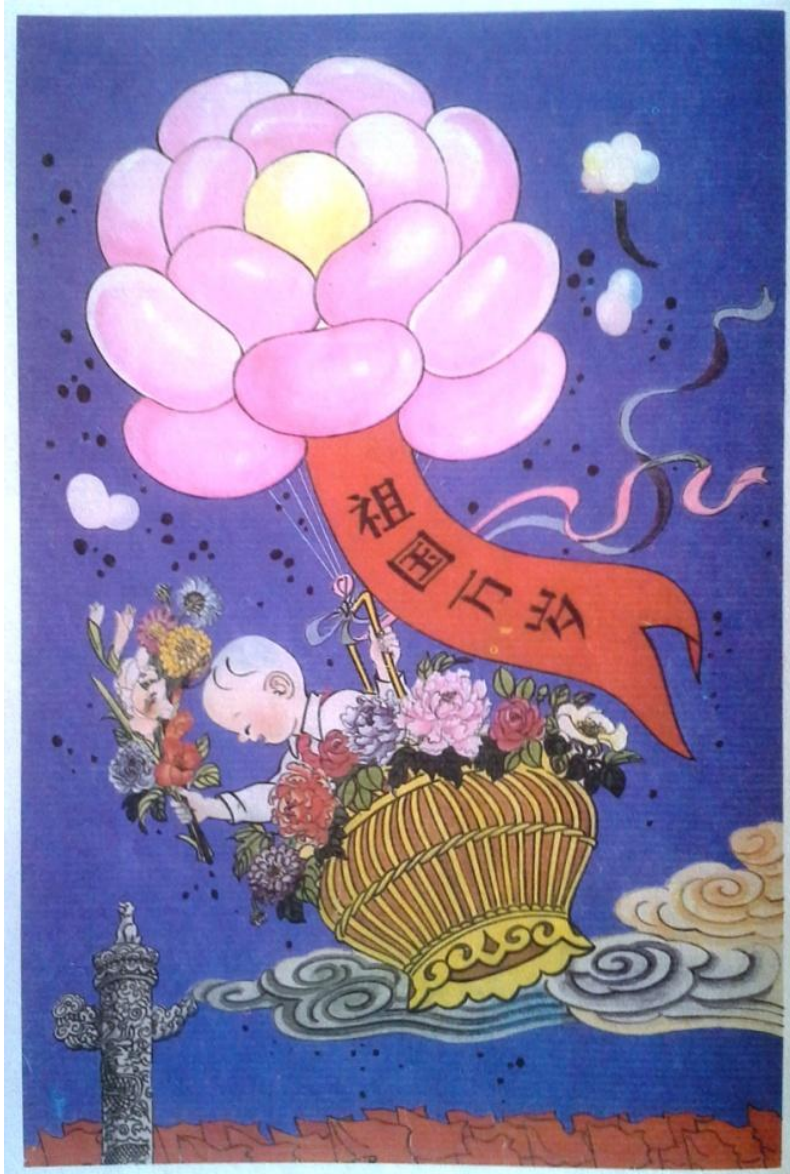


Fig. 36: Zhang Leping. 'Long Life to the Motherland' (*Zuguo wansui*, 祖國萬歲), *nianhua* for the tenth anniversary of the PRC 1959.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Zhang Qiming ed., *Sanmao zhi fu Zhang Leping* Vol.3, 79.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I demonstrated that the success of *Sanmao* comic strips during the first half of the twentieth century should be understood in relation to the growing popularity of comic art and the recent political interest in children in China. The idea that children were central to the survival and advancement of the Chinese nation was popularized by the contemporary commercial press, which also targeted children as potential consumers. Although *Sanmao* strips were an expression of the growing political and cultural significance of childhood in twentieth century China, in his strips Zhang Leping often challenged the most widespread representations of children by making his little hero an unconscious critic of the society. Zhang Leping's comics were considered an innovative product of children's literature, but they were attractive also for adult readers, who could understand the socio-political criticism of contemporary society hidden in the strips.

While the *Sanmao* strips of the early 1930s were mostly entertainment stories, during the Second Sino-Japanese War Zhang Leping's work went through a process of politicization that also involved his comic hero. The cartoonist adjusted his art to the new exigencies of war, in the attempt to use cartoons to rally the population against the Japanese. Children became one of the most popular subjects of wartime cartoons, and they often were presented as models for the population and the key for the survival of the country. Following this tendency, Zhang Leping's *Sanmao* became a model child, whose actions could be considered exemplary by children as well as adults in the fight against the Japanese. At the same time, the plight of homeless and orphaned children became a key element of propaganda, not least in the field of graphic art. Cartoonists were attentive to the plight of children, and in order to inform the population about this problem, Zhang Leping transformed *Sanmao* in an orphan, a theme that he also pursued after the end of the war.

If during the war Zhang Leping put his *Sanmao* at the service of the Nationalist government's propaganda program by adjusting the little hero's image to the exigencies of war, in his first post-war comic serial *Sanmao Joins the Army* the artist returned to comment on contemporary reality. Behind their humoristic tones, the strips of *SJTA* concealed sharp criticism towards of the patriotic rhetoric of wartime propaganda, putting forward a grim reading of the war experience and of its consequences for Chinese society. In *SJTA* Zhang Leping merged humor with the

gruesome reality of war in order to highlight the tragic consequences of the conflict on soldiers and civilians. Transforming Sanmao into a regular soldier Zhang Leping managed to create a farcical description of war his readers could laugh at, without excluding from his portrayal those elements which were rarely described in official propaganda, such as hunger, cruel death, inequality among soldiers and the boredom of life in the barracks. Although set during the War of Resistance, his comic serial did not seek to minimize the importance of fighting against the Japanese, indeed he employed the example of the War of Resistance to warn the population about the possible effects on the already exhausted population of a new war between Nationalists and Communists. Furthermore, by transforming Sanmao into a soldier and an improbable war-hero, Zhang Leping challenged the wartime propagandistic rhetoric which made of children model heroes for the population, by showing how these propagandistic representations of hero children did not fit the reality of war.

Children remain the main subject also of *The Wandering Life of Sanmao*, where the artist focused on homeless children's stark life conditions on the streets of Shanghai. The strips contained numerous references to contemporary socio-economic reality, from hyper-inflation to welfare. With *The Wandering Life*, Zhang Leping attempted to fulfil at least three interconnected aims: to inform his readers about the desperate conditions of street urchins, to collect money to help them and to denounce the municipal authorities' inability to tackle this social issue. The celebration of Children's Day – a commercial and patriotic festival – became an occasion for the artist to point out the extreme disparities between children's lifestyles, displaying to the public the Nationalists' responsibility for the increasing inequality among Chinese children. The worsening living conditions of the population under the Nationalist government and its inability to deal with welfare problems were some of the reasons for Zhang Leping's progressively harsher criticism of the GMD. The image of Sanmao was also employed for charitable and political purposes by journalists, social workers and movie directors. Children's welfare always remained at the center of their criticism towards the GMD, to the point that even the charity event 'Sanmao Life Exhibition' became an occasion for reflection on the government's failure to support street urchins.

After 1949, Zhang Leping had to review the style, content and concept of his *Sanmao* comic strips. While the artist employed his little hero to comment upon and criticize Chinese society and politics, the establishment of the PRC meant that he was forced to change the aim of his images. The CCP authorities decided that Sanmao was an engaging visual icon, whose popularity could be employed in order to popularize socialist ideology among young and adult readers. Sanmao's story, social background and even physical appearance had to be modified according to the new party ideology. Not only was *The Wandering Life* modified over the years in order to correct Sanmao's social background, but Zhang Leping also produced new strips which revised the story of his comic character by adjusting it to the teleological vision of history typical of socialist realism. In the last comic serial published before the Cultural Revolution, Sanmao was portrayed as an underground member of the CCP in Shanghai before 1949. The story of the transformation of Sanmao reveals several details about Zhang Leping's experience as an artist under the CCP. It appears that the artist was obliged to remove satire from his strips, and to move progressively towards educational tones more suitable for child readers. In the process much of the humour of the cartoons was lost. The transformation of Sanmao into an icon of the revolution and a model child paralleled Zhang Leping's change from a critic of society to a state-artist at the service of the party.

As mentioned above, I have chosen to conclude this thesis with an analysis of *The Days in which Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation*, the last comic serial published by Zhang Leping before the Cultural Revolution, since in it the story of Sanmao was completely integrated into the CCP's vision of history. Although the transformation of Sanmao into a loyal supporter of the Party and a model for the future generations was completed by 1962, the story of the little hero did not end in the early 1960s. When the Cultural Revolution started in 1966, Zhang Leping was accused of being a 'the dregs of the Nationalist old society (*Guomindang canzha yunie*, 國民黨殘渣餘孽), a 'reactionary academic' (*fandong xueshu quanwei*, 反動學術權威), and an 'unpunished rightist' (*louwang youpai*, 漏網右派). His little hero Sanmao was also accused of being 'a classic example of reactionary bourgeois human nature' (*Sanmao shi xichan jieji fandong renxing lun de dianxing*, 三毛是資產階級反動人性論的典型), of 'supporting capitulationism' (*guchui touxiang zhuyi*, 鼓吹投降主義) and 'peddling a philosophy of scraping a living' (*fanmai huoming*

zhexue, 販賣活命哲學). In particular, Zhang Leping's last comic serial *The Days when Sanmao Welcomed Liberation* was banned since it was accused of supporting the return of the Nationalist Party to the mainland.<sup>1</sup> As for many other cartoonists and intellectuals, the ten years of the Cultural Revolution were extremely harsh for Zhang Leping and his family. He had to witness the destruction of his private artworks by the Red Guards and he was prohibited from working, a situation which caused him serious depression. The artist expressed his feeling of impotence in a poem he wrote in 1966 and also in a self-portrait entitled 'Father' (*Baba*, 爸爸) which he sketched in the same year probably while worrying about the future of his family (Fig.1). In the poem as well as in the sketch he points out how his hair turned white in a very short time over the early months of the Cultural Revolution.

但有紅心在  
何愁白發多  
豪情勝舊舊  
引吭唱新詞.

If I have a red heart  
Why should my hair turn white out of  
worrying?  
Lofty feelings win over old ones.  
I sing with all my voice a new song.  
(Zhang Leping, 1966)



Fig .1: Zhang Leping. Self-portrait 'Father' (*Baba*, 爸爸),  
1966.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.



At the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, Zhang Leping was rehabilitated, and his Sanmao with him. In 1977, he published a new *Sanmao* comic serial in *Liberation Daily* entitled *Sanmao Studies Leifeng* (*Sanmao xue Leifeng*, 三毛學雷鋒). This was the first of numerous serials the artist published in magazines for children during the 1980s, which included *Sanmao's New Stories* (*Sanmao xinshi*, 三毛新事), *Sanmao Loves Science* (*Sanmao ai kexue*, 三毛愛科學), *Sanmao and Physical Education* (*Sanmao yu tiyu*, 三毛與體育), *Sanmao's Travels* (*Sanmao luyou ji*, 三毛旅遊記) and *Sanmao Studies Law* (*Sanmao xue fa*, 三毛學法).<sup>3</sup> His older comic strips were also cleared for publication: *The Wandering Life* was re-published for the first time after the Cultural Revolution in 1979, and its cinematographic version produced by Kunlun Studios in 1949 was screened at numerous movie festivals in Europe. In the same year, also *The Days in which Sanmao Welcomed the Liberation* was republished, followed by *Sanmao's Unauthorized Biography* in 1983. The cartoonist was particularly satisfied when in 1983 *Sanmao joins the Army* was republished by Sichuan Juvenile Press after being banned for thirty-four years. Zhang Leping eventually became a member of the Communist Party in April 1979. The cartoonist passed away in 1992 at the age of 82, and in 1995 the Zhang Leping Memorial Hall was opened in order to celebrate his work and dedication to Chinese children. Several Chinese artists dedicated cartoons to Zhang Leping and his Sanmao, for example Le Xiaoying 樂小英 (1921-1985), who decided to represent the artist and the little hero exchanging the iconic Young Pioneers' red scarf, an image which recalls of the comic 'Sanmao and Aliosha' (Fig.2).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 5, Fig.32.



Fig. 2: Le Xiaoying 樂小英, cartoon exhibited in the Zhang Leping Memorial Hall.<sup>5</sup>

The strips produced by Zhang Leping during the 1980s differ enormously from those analyzed in this thesis. The *Sanmao* serials published after 1976 are educational reading material for children and had lost the multi-layered nature of the pre-1949 strips. Furthermore, they did not engage with representations of history as was the case with the images published in the 1950s. These new comic serials taught young readers how to behave in public, how to be good students and how to respect parents and teachers. They provide us with information about the expectations of adults and state in relation to Chinese children, but they lack originality. *Sanmao joins the Army* and *The Wandering Life* remain the most popular among Zhang Leping's comic serials. Despite Zhang Leping's passing, the image of Sanmao and the content of his strips continue to be popularized and changed. In 2006, CCTV broadcast a cartoon series inspired by *The Wandering Life*; similarly in 2009 *Sanmao Joins the Army* was transformed into a TV animation serial. Zhang Leping's strips inspired also stage plays, a theme park dedicated to Sanmao, and a brand

<sup>5</sup> Feng Chuyin, *Yongyuan de Sanmao*, 80.

of children's clothes with the image of the cartoon hero. The image of Sanmao has been altered and adjusted to new visual media and to the taste of a new generation of fans. Furthermore, Sanmao has recently become a patriotic icon. The broadcasting of the serial *Sanmao joins the Army* on national television became an occasion for fostering Chinese children's nationalistic feelings against Japan, with which China still has tense political relations. In her research about contemporary film and media culture in China, Stephanie Donald quotes the answer of a thirteen-year-old boy from Shandong Province to the question 'what do animation and live action drama mean to you?' The boy drew a stylized image of Sanmao that he entitled 'China Best!' and commented:

Sanmao has been my favourite character since I was little. Whenever I see Sanmao, it reminds me of my childhood. Though the memories may seem vague, it brings back a sense of nostalgic feelings (...) I would like to make a movie about the Japanese invasion of China. I would make this movie dramatic and sensationalized. I would want this movie to be internationally famous. Some people may find this movie controversial and mentally numbing. But the truth is the truth.<sup>6</sup>

As pointed out by Donald, it is unclear if the comment of the boy was inspired by the original strips of *Sanmao joins the Army* or by the TV series. Furthermore, it is difficult to estimate whether patriotic value attached by the boy to the image of Sanmao was fostered by the media or was the result of his interpretation of the little hero's story in the light of contemporary discourse about Chinese nationalism. Certainly, the newest development of the little hero's stories and their reception among children confirm that Sanmao is still a powerful visual icon whose popularity is employed for the dissemination of political ideas about history and nationhood among children in China.

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<sup>6</sup> Stephanie Donald, *Little Friends: Children's Film and Media Culture in China* (Lanham, Md, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 1, 96.



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*Liangyou Huabao* 良友畫報 (*The Young Companion Pictorial*)

*Nüshen* 女神 (*Goddess*)

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